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AILIEFORD.

A FAMILY HISTORY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "JOHN DRAYTON."

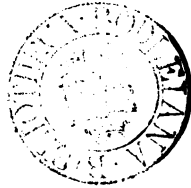
"JAQUES. It is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and, indeed, the sundry contemplation of my travels, in which my often rumination wraps me in a most humorous sadness.

"ROSALIND. A traveller! By my faith, you have great reason to be sad: I fear, you have sold your own lands, to see other men's; then, to have seen much, and to have nothing, is to have rich eyes and poor hands.

"JAQUES. Yes, I have gained my experience."—AS YOU LIKE IT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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AILIEFORD.

CHAPTER I.

ABOUT six o'clock we set out again to keep our appointment with Mary Burnet and her uncle. It was moon-light, dim and pallid, and the evening frost had congealed to crystal the streams of snow with which the sunshine had bathed our country roads. Here and there in the corner of a field remained a white patch, crisp and uncovered, glittering all over with minute sharp points of ice, and the chill night wind had arrested the droppings from the trees, and suspended them in rigid icicles from every

projecting bough. But clear in the sky were the remote unsympathetic stars, looking on coldly and without concern at the struggling widowed moon.

A little brighter is the light in the window of Mary Burnet's parlour, and it strikes me strangely to find that there seems even a lightening of the atmosphere within. A good fire, ruddy and cheerful, burns in the grate; the hearth by which I watched three nights ago glows with pure good order, and homelike comfort. Tea is on the table waiting for us, and Mary in her black dress sits on the low chair by the fire, quietly sewing as usual, composed, and grave, and calm. Everything is over—the sufferer, suffering no longer, is beyond the reach of either fear, or anxiety, or hope—and Mary's heart rests calmly in its grief, nor kills its peace with fancied evils. Enough of real sorrow has the orphan, scarcely witting where to turn, or how to arrange her new and solitary life; but the agonies of imagination are not with Mary. She has been able to

leave her father in his grave—to trust everything to God.

When she called him from above on our entrance, her uncle came. Mr. David Burnet was perfectly composed. His brother had passed away entirely from his horizon, and it was impossible to guess now that the “poor John,” once or twice mentioned in the course of the evening, was anything to the survivor. If his heart had been touched by the closing scene, the emotion was past and gone hours ago. Decent composure and gravity, in which neither true feeling nor the lack of it, was at all conspicuous, marked the respectable demeanour of Mr. David Burnet. He was not hurried nor impatient either; but he was visibly anxious to have every thing settled and return home.

And we gathered soberly about the spread table, and Mary, in her grave and composed quietness, did not hesitate to take her usual place. Very soon an indifferent conversation began between my mother and Mr. Burnet. Mary scarcely spoke—I never—but there was

little visible emotion among us ; quietness, a somewhat subdued tone of voice, a composure of look and manner, but nothing more.

In the meanwhile I myself burned with nervous impatience, terrified to hear a beginning to Mr. Burnet's statement of arrangements before I submitted my own projects to Mary. I had at last an opportunity of whispering to her how much I wished to see her alone, and Mary withdrew at once to wrap a shawl round her, and go out with me. We had no other way of conversing by ourselves.

" Well, Willie ?"

We had gone along the road for some distance in silence ; drearily the wind about us was whispering among the trees ; drearily the frozen channel by the road side threw back the sheen of the pale moon. At the foot of the descending path a cottage window burned with an intense glow into the night, a home-star warm and cheerful—it was the only sign of comfort between the frost-bound soil and the glittering unsympathetic skies.

"You're not to leave me, Mary?" asked I, hurriedly.

Mary made no answer, and her hand neither tightened nor loosened its light hold upon my arm.

"You may think me heartless, speaking so soon," continued I, "but it is best to lose no time in these arrangements. We have all life and the future before us now—and we have our fate to make. It is best to decide on what it is to be at once—you think so, Mary?"

"I think so; I have no choice, but must decide at once, whether I will or no," said Mary, "or else have my uncle to do it for me."

But nothing which could give me the faintest clue to her own wish or purpose fell from Mary's lips. I was tantalized, impatient, hasty.

"I came to tell you of a new project of my own," exclaimed I, hurriedly; "but, Mary, I am entirely in the dark—you do not trust me—I cannot tell—I cannot guess how your own inclination turns."

"Inclination has little to do with the like of us," said Mary, "we must do just what can be done, Willie; that is all the length we can go."

"What can be done if we could but manage for this once to see with the same eyes?" said I. "Now, Mary, hear my plan, and consider it. It is feasible, mind—I know that—so you must not condemn it as rash till you have fully heard it. Listen now."

And I told her Christina's suggestion—my new project. Mary heard me quietly to an end; she was perverse to-night.

"I see only risk in it and venturesomeness, Willie," she said at last. "It is very good of you, no doubt, to think of giving up your situation, and trying such a new beginning for my sake—but, Willie, what you have is sure, and will get better, as you get older. Teachers are aye poor—they never get more than they can live on—and then they need to be aye studying and learning; Willie, you're better as you are."

"I am nothing as I am," said I, in half desperation, "and never will be, Mary, if you stand between me and this new chance. I **will fail** of both heart and hope. What am I to be in the office? Ballantyne, the head clerk, is a man of forty; I never can either displace him or have reasonable chance of succeeding him. He is a very decent man too, and the father of a family. I would not hurt him if I could, even for my own advancement, and I see now that yonder there is no progress for me. I must do something else if I am to be an independent man."

"I do not see how that should be," said Mary, slightly startled; "folk think it a great thing to get their sons into offices in Edinburgh."

"Folk are deceived," said I. "Trust me, who know the chances better than you do, Mary, I can make no progress in Mr. Middleton's—with this plan I think I may—but Mary, the decision is in your hands—it is you who must determine my fate."

There was a long silence—to me, filled with irritating suspense and uncertainty—to Mary, I fancy, full of deliberation. Tantalized and provoked by her steady silence, I quickened my pace, and unconsciously hurried her along the frosty road. Drawing her shawl round her with a slight trembling, Mary yielded to my impatient impulse. We walked hastily up and down under the gaunt trees, all feebly glittering in the icy moonlight. Through the intense silence came now and then the deep baying of a watch-dog from some distant farm, or the crackle of dry boughs close at hand; and through the gloom shone the cottage light on one side, and Mary's own window on the other. Back and forward we went and came, over crashing ice, and under dreary trees—a strange place and time for such a consultation as ours.

At last, waxing almost angry in my impatience, I again broke the silence.

“Mary—it must come to be a plain question between us—I am tormented with this suspense. Just now I have fifty pounds a-year, and all

the chances of increase I ever had—will you make the experiment, and try what we can do together, with that? You may trust me, Mary—when I can increase our living by any means, I will not spare work on it; or, on the other hand, here is a new prospect, a reasonable chance; there is risk in it, but only such risk as there is in every beginning; will you give me your sanction—your promise to try that? Say something at least—let there be something before us, some future to look to, Mary! I am ready to embrace almost anything—anything you are willing to share. Mary—Mary Burnet, tell me what you will do!”

“Willie, do not be angry; for six months I will go with my uncle,” said Mary, in her steady quiet voice.

Man as I was, my first shock of vexation and disappointment brought tears to my eyes—tears hot, bitter, and scalding. I could not pause to think of the prudencies and proprieties which influenced Mary, the points of necessary

decorum which were as weighty with her as with a duchess. I only felt myself cast back and repelled, my warmth chilled, my enthusiastic confidence opposed by the blank barrier of this passive resistance ; and petulant, irritated, disappointed, I scarcely could restrain myself.

“ You laid my father in his grave only this morning,” said Mary, faltering momentarily. “ It is true I am almost friendless, and have neither home nor means ; but I can take care of myself, and keep myself too, for a time ; and he must have the proper respect, Willie, the proper time of mourning. My uncle offers to take me with him—I think I will go—and in the meantime you can give this better thought, and make up your mind quietly. Think now if you were making a rash venture, and changing all your life just in a week or a day for me, how I would feel if you failed—I would have no comfort of my life, Willie.”

“ Ay, is it so ?” said I, “ you would rather leave me than have a fantastic responsibility

and the chance of a failure for your sake. You are too proud to let me fail for you, Mary. Well, well, let it be so. We cannot see this question with the same eyes, either. I think I could throw myself into your fate, fearing no responsibility; and after all we are both responsible for many things to each other; but maybe you think the hope deferred is a less trial than the chance of external failure. Mary, Mary! nothing in this world can keep you free of responsibility for me—never think it—you accepted it yon October night—accepted risk and venture, when you accepted the heart I could not keep from clinging to you; and now is it changed—is it all changed?”

There was another pause. I saw Mary put up her hand to her cheek, and my own eyes were hot and full.

“Willie, there’s no change,” she said at last, “no change in me; I had not time to think of circumstances then at all, I had only to think that—that you cared for me, Willie, and to be glad. I am glad yet to think of that—but

when there's worldly things in hand, then comes prudence and thought, Willie, and we must be canny—folk in our little way—but I'm no changed in my heart."

My tears fell now, two or three drops less bitter, and mingled with her own. I was subdued to her once again, and full of compunction for the pain I had added to her grief. Then everything was so true, so sensible—the petulant heart, indeed, might chafe and fret, and weary itself with inexpressible resistance to this wisdom which its instinct doubted; but judgment and reason always assented to Mary, and after the first flash of impatient self-assertion, the heart by-and-bye, sore and unconvinced, blinded itself and became silent too.

"You're no angry, Willie?" said Mary, gently. "Now I'll tell you what we can do. My uncle has a big family, and plenty to do in his house. I know very well I'm handy enough to make them amends for six months' shelter—so I never hesitate to take it, Willie. They'll

no be very kind, maybe—is that what you mean by starting?—but never mind, I'm no feared. My uncle takes me partly out of kindness, partly because it would be a shame for him to neglect me, partly because I can be of use at home. You see, Willie, I understand, and am not looking for more than I am likely to get; and, for my part, I go with him for mixed reasons too. He is my nearest friend, and it is the proper refuge for me—it's right I should be away a while—it's right my own friends should own me—and as I said, I'm no feared but I can make them amends. So you see, Willie, it's only a bargain, and if they're no very good to me, I'll never heed, nor break my heart for every slight like poor Sibby in her aunt's. Six months is a good while; you'll have time to think, and to prepare if you fix on this after all—and—what does your mother say, Willie?"

"Approves," said I briefly.

"Approves!—does she, Willie? And then you can write to me about it," said Mary,

touching my arm with a more distinct pressure, "and take good thought yourself. I only want what's best for you ; for that is sure to be best for **us both**. And you're no angry, Willie? —we're not to part ill friends, and me my lane in the world now."

"Oh! Mary! Mary!" I grasped her hand in a half passion of loving dissatisfaction, uncertainty, reproof, "if you would only have more need of me, if you would only be less sensible, less sufficient for yourself! I believe I am a foolish fellow—not half so wise as you are; but have some need of me, Mary Burnet—let me think you have some need of me!"

"Whisht, Willie," said Mary, with a smile, "you're no to say that; I have aye need of you. But now my uncle will be wearying, and so will your mother. I suppose you'll have to say something to him, Willie, and tell him about your new plan—he'll like to hear."

So we returned to the house, where my mother and Mr. Burnet were deep in consultation. Mary's sole property, the furniture,

already had its fate sealed, and she made no objection. I, in my poor boyish romance, could not bear to dissociate from Mary's image the little chair and pretty table which she had used so long, and they had already taken their permanent place in our imaginary establishment and my dreams. But Mary knew of tangible necessities close at hand and present, while our imaginary establishment had not caught her attention, even by my vivid picture of it, too far away in the clouds of a future—which her nature did not tempt her to pry into—to be visible to the clear eyesight which beheld within its own limits so distinctly and well. And I too saw with moderate capacity and distinctness within *my* limits ; but alas for the shadowy range of possibilities which shut out the present from me !

Mr. David Burnet heard my plan with attention, gave me very good advice, recommended study, preparation, and the immediate use of all means of influence to prepare the good people of Moulisburgh for my projected school.

The scheme was feasible to him, and he gave his counsel upon it like a sensible man. I was cheered and restored to my hopefulness; henceforth the six months looked to me a very necessary interval, and with quick contentment I solaced myself with contemplation of the end.

CHAPTER II.

NEXT day Mr. David Burnet returned home. He was a Glasgow merchant, in himself sufficiently respectable and competent, though holding no great rank among the princely buyers and sellers of the western metropolis. A sensible man, tolerably well-educated, very well acquainted with the ordinary politics and topics of the day, he made a great impression on my mother. To her, his comfortable parentage—son of a merchant like himself—was good family, his modest means, good station; and it was with no small satisfaction that my mother spoke to me of Mary's connections, their standing and elevation. My good mother

had a weakness on this point ; and though she would have shrunk with the most sensitive pride from using these same connections as means of profit, she was still flattered by their dignity. Poor Sibby Wood was something of a *mésalliance* ; the comfortable family of Mr. Robert Bell were considerably below my mother's self-acquired level. She was very much content that I should neutralize the lowering influence by the superior standing of Mary's unknown friends.

And Mary herself spent the following week at Ailieford while the sale went on—her old home was dismantled, and her father's affairs arranged. On the day of the sale, I had leave of absence from the office, and jealously watched through the hazy afternoon hours the proceedings of the auctioneer. My quarter day was newly past ; my share of our expenses transferred to Sibby ; and I was content to buy my Latin dictionary at second-hand, and to restrain still more straightly my few and frugal expenses, for one purchase here. My very hand trembled

with anxiety, when Mary's chair and Mary's table came under the hammer; but Mary's table and Mary's chair were objects of supreme indifference to everybody but me, and with a beating heart I secured them, and found myself possessed of a kind of earnest of my future home. We laid them up in my old room at Ailieford, where I exhibited them joyously to my mother and Mary, receiving with almost childish delight their astonishment and pleasure; for the matter was a private matter unmentioned until its completion. And there they stood unused in my little chamber; the spring sunshine brightened upon them day by day—pretty hostages for their absent mistress—gentle-tongued assurances of my new home.

On the next morning she was to leave us, and Dr. Burnet's grave in the Moulisburgh churchyard had been tenanted only a week; yet our tea-table on that evening was anything but an uncheerful one. My mother laid aside her work, and Mary dropped hers on her knee—both were employed in kindly labours for the

behoof of Sibby. It was still daylight, and the radiance of the fire softened and mellowed the atmosphere of our little parlour. The light of the sunset was just stealing away from the green wall by the edge of the window ; without, the breeze was rustling the wands of the white rose-bush against the panes once more, and the long grass waved on the little green, where Marget stood relieving it of the snow-white "bleaching" which had lain there all day under the sun. If the wind whistled somewhat shrilly about the outer walls, and twisted the linen round Marget's bare sturdy arms as she heaped it into her basket, it did us no harm within ; and the light slanted away over the greening fields of spring—over loosened horses, and ploughs stranded in the rich, half-turned soil, and ploughmen going home. Spring was in the air, chill but kindly—spring in the stir which awoke our hearts to the future ; sorrow and grief, winterly care, and trouble, and despondency lay covered over like last week's snow, in gloomy hollows among the hills ; true, to-

morrow's labours, partings, journeys lay before us as before all the world ; but our hearts were braced and stirring, ready for that which was to come.

“ And you'll mind, Mary, my dear,” said my mother, “ if your aunt should chance to be anything but kindly, or yourself no like the place—you'll mind there's aye room for you at Ailieford.”

“ No fear,” said Mary ; “ there must be something to put up with—there is in every place except the fairyland that Willie thinks of, Mrs. Mitchell ; but I'll no come back to trouble you in Ailieford—no till the autumn at least. My aunt will just be like other folk ; sometimes kind, likely, and sometimes ill-pleased ; but I'm not going to Glasgow to live like Willie's princess there. I'm no expecting to be very happy—just to wear through every day, neither very ill nor very well : I'll no be disappointed, Mrs. Mitchell—I look for nothing more than that.”

“ And Willie's princess is a tragic lady ? you

think she makes a great work about little things," said I, half piqued, half pleased. "Well, Mary, wait till you come back again—then we'll see."

"No ; I think Sibby was like Willie's princess," said Mary, with a smile. "Her heart was half broken when her aunt was in an ill-humour, and I have seen Sibby uplifted with a little kindness, and nearly killed with a little trouble. I will take it like a day's work, and never heed."

"Poor Sibby, she has had her ain troubles since you were two lassies together," said my mother, "and a stout heart to them too—but it's my hope they're past now. Anyway, Mary, my woman, mind you're to put up with no oppression—neither slight, nor carelessness, nor keeping down—though I expect no such thing in a house where your uncle is the head—only it's aye the wife I'm feared for in cases like this ; but you've aye a kindly home, if it's no so fine as Mrs. Burnet's, here with me—and come when you like, you're sure of a welcome."

But Mary, as she thanked my mother, was still convinced of her own perfect ability to bear all that might have to be borne, and would have no abstract sympathy on the score of going among strangers. I should have been very well pleased to find her, in this case, somewhat given to take the matter tragically as my heroine might have done ; but Mary would not be a heroine, and continued most obstinately cheerful and moderate in her estimate of the difficulties before her.

Next morning our changeful skies sent down a blast of wintry sleet, before which the young leaves and plants cowered like timid children. It was a late and hard spring following upon a mawkish, weeping, undecided winter ; but disagreeable as it was, we had our hasty breakfast over very early, and started in the chill disconsolate dawn to walk in to Moulisburgh, to secure our places in the earliest coach. Mary's trunks had been forwarded the previous night, and now wrapped up, shawled and veiled, my mother set out with her to see her away. I was almost

glad that the thin, sharp, white blast of half-frozen rain blew into our faces as we passed Dr. Burnet's deserted house ; but Mary turned to look at it steadily—a grave look, in which there was both solemnity and emotion—an unspoken farewell—and yet in that one glance she had time to remember the broken pane with which some urchin had relieved the blank of the parlour window. Mary ! Mary ! you never knew how you tantalized and provoked, and kept in a perpetual ferment, the romance and ideal glory which were so fair to make fair garments for your image in your boy lover's heart !

Dreary was the sea, rushing with its low white curl of foam on the rocks—dreary the white blast of sleet pouring down upon its waves—and melancholy the road, which this same white blinding sleet cleared of all passengers, charging along its whole breadth like a remorseless impassible dragoon, impervious alike to flattery and force. Neither riot nor insurrection of modern days could have stood

against that sweeping charge of hail. In the very streets of Edinburgh inevitable undelayable traffic cowered before it, flying under an umbrella, with clinging skirts, and bowed head; and down it came behind us, along the level length of Princes Street, sweeping us before its might, and clearing, as with a visible desolation, the broad deserted pavement, where only the hailstones clanked instead of footsteps. Cold and cheerless, we made our way to the miserable chill canal by which Mary was to travel. Lamentations over her would not dry her wet outer garments, or give warmth to her benumbed fingers; we had to see her safely into the little cabin, and leave her there for her ten hours' journey, to solace herself as she best might. A basket, which had travelled from Ailieford in my mother's hand, changed owners when we got so far, and was found to contain my mother's own particular "snow boots," warm, and dry, and comfortable, over and above the biscuits and sandwiches which it professed to bear, and with this, all the external comfort

we could supply, we bade Mary farewell, and stood drearily under our umbrella, watching the boat steal away along the languid tide, to which the constant commotion of the falling hail gave some semblance of life. Then we turned back, no easy matter, and I hurried with my mother to the foot of the stair where our lodgings were, and hurried back again to the office—not soon enough to escape a warning shake of the head, and half-muttered reproof from Mr. Ballantyne, the chief clerk in our little counting-house, but in sufficient time for the business of the day.

And spite of all discomforts, spite of the sweeping hail and cheerless sky, which of themselves would have sunk a less steady temper into despondency, Mary had gone away with a cheerful face, and sober, unenthusiastic expectations, very little likely, as she herself said, to encounter great disappointment. She was gone; no more hope of a Sabbath evening interview to lighten the week, or of a little service to be rendered her, or watch to be

held under her window. Mary never knew, indeed, at any time, of these little secret outbursts of boyish devotion. I had an unacknowledged certainty that she would not be likely quite to appreciate them, and might have prosaic ideas of taking colds and coughs, and no particular inclination to watch herself, and give her romantic adorer a glimpse from the lattice of his lady; so I had my sentimental pleasure to myself. But Mary was gone—the fact returned upon me as I mused over my book-keeping—and here there interposed a blank wedge of so many weeks and months between us, in which, if ever, certain things fell to be done. “Thinking better of it,” was a gift which no good genius had ever conferred on me. Deliberation was not in my way, and my best chance of a wise conclusion was to leap at it, and endeavour to *do* the thing which a greater amount of forethought and calculation might possibly show to be more prudent than I dreamed of; but prudence was not a natural faculty of mine. I could apprehend things

vividly, decide on them rapidly when occasion served, especially if they had the charm of novelty and fell in with the inclination of the moment; but "to think well of it," or weigh it wisely, was an impracticable operation. My plan itself must have slipped out of my hands altogether in the maze of bewilderment to which this deliberation could not fail to lead; so I did not think well of it. I accepted it as a thing fixed on and certain, and proceeded to realize it in imagination, resolved to lose not a single evening in preparing for its new offices and duties.

Yes, I had bought a second-hand Latin Dictionary, had sought out with much pains and care, sundry Rudiments and Delectuses ruefully familiar of old, and had already done a little at my schoolboy Virgil with some enthusiasm and energy. I was not indolent; and sitting at the hushed table where Jamie and his young wife talked with subdued voices not to disturb me, was very far from unpleasant. I went home with a quickened step and buoy-

ant resolution. I had much to do—my own desultory information to bring into working order, my old schoolboy knowledge to burnish up and lead back to necessary system and form, my miscellaneous acquirements to make inventory of and bring into proper trim for use; much to do, work that would leave no spare margin of this six months of evenings; and I went home with great spirit and energy, longing to begin.

A little wailing voice struck me aghast as I opened the door of our sitting-room. Sibby was invisible, and voices of womankind sounded from within the closed door of my own chamber. Alas for my first night's study! for Jamie, half-laughing, half-crying, stood by the table, contemplating, in my mother's triumphant arms, the owner of the little peevish voice. My niece Elizabeth! you had been born that day!

My Latin Dictionary had been laid at my mother's feet for a footstool—it was an immense thick quarto, worthy its position—my

other books were all overturned and scattered, and a hum of womanish voices made an end to the hush which my studies demanded; nevertheless, magnanimous placable I, straightway became as unsteady as my brother, and laughed low tearful laughs over the little one, and was amazed and disconcerted, pleased and fluttered, and embarrassed more than I can tell.

For that night there was no study to be thought of; and by-and-bye my mother advised us, "like good laddies, to gang and take a walk and be out of the way." Very submissively we two useless persons, who could not flatter ourselves on being of the least service in the emergency, obeyed; and Jamie—our Jamie, my young, thoughtless brother—poured into my heart his half-weeping, half-articulate emotion, his broken incredulous joy, his enthusiastic resolutions to do everything man could do for Sibby and her little bairn. Her little bairn! he spoke of it as something sacred, holy, a gift out of heaven to his young gentle wife. He scarcely seemed to dare appro-

priating this little precious mysterious creature to himself.

Once before the full flood-tide of Jamie's emotion had come into my heart. Something hallowing and sanctifying now had fallen upon his joy—and he was to do—oh, the grand devoted, self-sacrificing things our Jamie was to do!—the heroic love which was to throw its strong arms under the mother and the child and carry them up into a very paradise of tenderness and sunshine and joy. The streets were gleaming dark and wet, as we went along the pavement, scarcely conscious of the soil we trode on—for never did worshipper believe in his saint more thoroughly than my simple faith rested on Jamie, and never rapt enthusiast was more secure of the reality of his ecstasies and visions than was my brother's heart of its own entire sincerity and truth.

CHAPTER III.

FOR the ensuing week my books remained well-nigh useless ; and still my mother, throned in the arm-chair, used Ainsworth's Dictionary for her footstool ; and still my Virgil, my Gradus, my Rudiments, were lost in bewildering heaps of muslin, crowned with little delicate caps not big enough for my hand, smothered in shawls- and wrappings for the important stranger whose claims to attention threw all others into the shade. I think Jamie's half-confused ecstasy of humble adoration lasted out the seven days—my excitement of wonder and bewildered pleasure fully did, I know—and at the end of the week, when I came in to tea

as usual, Sybil herself had re-appeared, and somewhat pale, somewhat languid, sat among a heap of cushions in the arm-chair, with her baby on her knee. She had been wrapped in a long white gown, a tartan shawl of light colours, fresh pink and blue and white, and had a little wifely cap covering her beautiful hair. Smiles of calm reposing joy were on the delicately tinted lip, which I had never observed to be so finely formed before, and the large deep blue eyes, veiled under their soft eyelids, watched over the tiny face on Sybil's knee with a depth of unspeakable emotion which touched me to the heart. Yes, the gift had come to her out of the benign and gracious heavens—and lay here, tranced and silent, within the close hold of her embrace. A better world than her old fairyland of possibility and hope—a real world, another undeveloped fate, before which lay every glorious chance that ever had brightened Sybil's dreams—and her very breath came hushed and with a check of awe upon the soft brow of her new-born child.

By this time Mary had written me her first letter—no small event, though on the first shock of the matter a slightly disappointing one—yet Mary's reserve and sober gravity became her—and I had been trained to look for the shame-facedness which ventured on no audible or visible approach towards the passionate—and it took only a few days to satisfy me with the letter of Mary.

“My dear Willie,

“I got through by the canal quite safe, though being such a bad day, there was little pleasure in the journey, but I looked out at every town and country place we came to, and saw as much of the road as I could. In the second boat, for we had to change at Falkirk, I got a book, and was very comfortable, considering, till we came to Port Dundas. It was nine at night when the boat stopped—raining, and cold and dreary—and just a lamp here and there to show how black the night was, and the wet flags on the canal bank, and the little

wooden office, dripping with rain, that stood close by. But I kept up a good heart, and gathered my things together, and looked round for somebody waiting—and so there was, my uncle himself, which was a great consolation. Then we had a walk of about a mile and a half to my uncle's house, which is up one stair, a good house, in a very good street. There are six of the family—the eldest son about ages with you; then Jeanie, who is eighteen; then David, fifteen, and all the rest bairns. I see nothing to make me change my opinion that they would just be like other folk—and no doubt they have their tempers and their faults like the rest of us—and I can see already I have not come to your fairyland; but my aunt is good to them, and seems to be a sensible woman, and to have a proper respect for herself, which is sure to keep her from being ill to me. The three youngest are all girls, and Jeanie is getting a fine education, and so is a little handless in the house—so I am sure to have plenty to do, which comforts me.

“But there are two servants, and a very well furnished house, dining-room and drawing-room, and my uncle seems a comfortable man, even better off in the world than I expected. His son John is in the office with him, and they have besides a young clerk, like what you were when you went into Edinburgh first. I would not wonder—for I have been noticing what they say about this lad, and about business things generally—if you were right in your own notion of having little chance of rising in the office—for you are never likely to be a keen business man like what they speak of here—and now I come to think of it, a quiet life in Moulisburgh, and your books, and your teaching are liker you a great deal. Not being very well acquainted yet, and my aunt having enough to do looking after the house, I get plenty time to think when I am busy at my seam. You will say I was always used to that; but then for this long time I have had other things to think about than either myself or you; now that is all past, and I can give my mind to it.

I think your own notion is very good, and that you should do all you can for it—no doubt it is a risk—and risk is a thing that always troubles me ; but we cannot help it, and there can come no good of speaking, so I have made up my mind to your plan, and am very well content.

“ Tell your mother I am very well and comfortable, and always thankful when I mind of her, so kind as she was to me—and say I am very glad to hear about Sibby, and would like to see the baby ; I maybe will some day, by the time it’s six months old. I will write next week if I hear from you in the meantime, and hope you will be well and keep a good heart, and be cheerful and content, as I am. Dear Willie, fare you well,

“ Your’s affectionately,

“ MARY BURNET.”

I thought there was something like a shy melting into tenderness in these last words, and I lingered over them till my imagination

gave them life, and "dear Willie, fare you well" stole in upon my heart many a time like a glimpse of sunshine. Yet my letter was not much like what people call a love-letter—so very sober and literal, and matter-of-fact. Well—but my own pang of secret disappointment very soon gave way to cheerful satisfaction. Mary was not given to speeches of sentiment; and I felt that she would have spoken to me just as she wrote.

The tropes and the fervors, the half meditative fancies which come in upon the heart of young love, with all their host of sweet similitudes, their bits of unconscious poetizing, their wrapt and absorbed abstraction, were for me to use. But I never knew what Mary thought of my letters—strange, warm, enthusiastic, boyish outpourings as they were.

So we again returned to the quiet tenor of our life. Many a growl of dissatisfaction had reached us from Ailieford during the week of close and kindly nursing which my mother had bestowed upon Sybil. Still more unsenti-

mental than Mary—ashamed himself to utter a word more affectionate than usual, or receiving such when addressed to him with a half contemptuous “humph” and extremely apt to grumble and find fault, and lay a perpetual burden of failings at the door of “your mother,”—my father still could not live without her—and was wretched when she left him for a day. “Ill to hae and waur to want,” said my mother, shaking her head, as she received call after call to return, and at last Sybil was sufficiently strong to be trusted to herself, and my mother went back to Ailieford, leaving us to fall into our former routine, and resume our suspended habitudes. I myself, by dint of purchasing a footstool covered with resplendent carpeting, rescued my “Ainsworth” from its lowly place, and the long streaming skirts of muslin, the little caps and wrappers, began to grow familiar with their local habitation, and find for themselves a regular and legitimate place. My “Gradus” and my “Virgil” found room again upon the cleared table—the baby, early

impressed with a reverence for learning, restrained its small voice at night; Sybil sat working after her former fashion; Jamie dallied with a book as of old—and only the wicker cradle in the warm corner, with its small inhabitant lost in slumber, changed the aspect of our familiar room.

CHAPTER IV.

"WILLIE," said Sibby, with a little shyness and hesitation, looking up from her work as I sat beside her with my books, busy at mine, "do you mean to take a house at Moulisburgh at the term?"

"I think so, Sibby," said I; and in my turn I looked up with a flush of sudden pleasure.

Sybil's brow was curved and grave with thought; and just pausing to touch the cradle, which swayed softly by her side, she took a few deliberate stitches, and resumed:

"We're coming into more expense, Willie. Could anything be done, do you think, to help Jamie to a better place? I know he would be

very willing to do anything himself; but then, somebody must advise and help him. What can we do, think you, Willie?"

I closed "Ainsworth," heavy as he was, upon my fingers, and looked up with grave consideration—at the first question I could do nothing more.

"You see, forty pounds is very little," said Sybil, stooping with her new maternal grace and tenderness over the sleeping infant; "and though we might just keep one room when you left us, Willie, I am feared it would be very hard to make Jamie's income do. Do you think he's old enough, or good enough at business? for you see we must do something for the bairn; and maybe," added Sybil, with a slight blush, shaking back the hair which shaded her brow, "maybe, to get a little higher up in the world."

And again the young mother cast an anxious, lingering look at the cradle. Yes, there it lay—the small, unconscious inheritor of all her own unrealized dreams—the little being

before whom still lay all the fairy chances of fortune—to whom everything was possible ; and Sybil had already transferred to it all her own vague, visionary girlish hopes.

“ I think Jamie is quite fit for a better place,” said I, “ and we have been thinking of it ever since—we should take more decided steps now, that is very true. By-the-bye, Sibby, if nothing better turned up, Jamie might even go to Mr. Middleton’s in place of me.”

Sibby slightly shook her head : it was only an increase of ten pounds a year.

Just then, Jamie, who had been kept late at business, came in, and there ensued a little stir of preparation for tea. When my books were cleared off the table, the cups filled, and ourselves occupied with our homely meal, Jamie left the cradle, over which he too had been bending, to seize upon my newly cut bread-and-butter, and announce to us with a little flush and excitement, the news of his day.

“ Donald Clerk has had a legacy left him,”

said Jamie; "a house in the country, and a very pretty sum in the bank. I wonder why these good things always fall to the lot of folk who are in no need of them. But, Sibby, this may throw something in our way. He was saying to-day he would retire. Donald begins to grow an old man, Willie, and he'll need a manager for the warehouse; now I don't see anybody that would suit him so well as me."

"Nor I—you should apply at once," said I, quickly.

"Man, he's such a grim fellow!" said Jamie, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Then he's been accustomed for so long a time to think me a boy. I wish somebody else could speak to him first; but nobody cares to encounter Donald Clerk."

"Could I?" said Sibby, her colour rising.

"You?" Jamie looked with a slight blush and happy smile at his young wife. He was very proud of her, and with good reason. Graceful and stately as Sybil had always been she had lately acquired a gracious, gentle dignity,

very singular and unusual, as if her whole nature softened and expanded, feeling its legitimate outlet—its possible fulfilment in this child.

“You! what would Donald say to her, think you, Willie?” said Jamie, with proud exulting laughter. “Grim Donald Clerk, wifeless and loveless, what would he say to Sibby? would she throw glamour in his e’en?”

“Or maybe get herself wounded by his coarse Norland tongue,” said I, jealous over her sanctity, and less inclined than Jamie to exhibit his prize. “Both might happen, it is true; but I would not have Donald Clerk charmed into granting you the situation at the risk of wounding Sibby. No—where she goes, she must be safe from rudeness, and Donald would be rude to an angel.”

“Willie begins to pay compliments,” said Jamie, laughing, “and neither Sibby nor the angel would be quite at home in the warehouse; but if *she* should not go, Willie, who can?”

"We can," said I. "I will get an hour to-morrow, if you like, and I am not afraid to face Donald Clerk."

"It was Willie too that spoke to him first," said Sibby, slightly blushing at her own clear recollection of Jamie's boyish confidences. "To be a manager would be a grand thing, would it not? and I'm turning greedy. Be you good laddies, as your mother says, and dinna lose time. I'll lift the dictionary myself, Willie; and you'll see what grand ladies Mary and me will be, when she's Mrs. Mitchell of Loretto, with a houseful of rich scholars, and I'm spending all Jamie's great income, an Edinburgh merchant's wife—you'll just see, Willie!"

Much rejoiced was I to anticipate seeing; and we scarcely got settled again that night—for Jamie had new particulars about Donald Clerk's retirement to communicate—and Sibby rose into a little unwonted liveliness and exhilaration, imagining the magnificences that might follow if Jamie really succeeded in getting this elevation. Then it might be possible to descend two flats,

perhaps, or to remove boldly into the new town—to have two rooms for themselves alone, with sundry splendid imaginations of furniture—for such were Sybil's flights of romantic anticipation now.

The next morning, windy, dusty, bleak and cold, true to the old character of the borrowing days, awoke us to a little excitement. Jamie, with all the boy's careless defiance of the growls of Donald Clerk, had a boy's natural avoidance too, of direct encounter with the warehouse bear. I who had never done anything important without little tremors of anxiety, hopes and fears—I dare say quite contemptible to sturdier tempers—was considerably absorbed with premeditation of what to say, and how to conciliate the favour of the ungracious Aberdonian—while Sybil contemplated us both with a little envy, and a very strong evident impulsion to take the matter out of our hands, in the secure certainty, so strong with all impetuous people, of accomplishing the *coup de main* with greater force herself.

Without being aware of it, and entirely without purpose in the matter, we had all risen earlier than usual—and the additional half hour spent over breakfast was full of all manner of suggestions. But only Sybil and I were quite serious and earnest over this important step. Jamie continually ran aside into little bursts of laughter, into jokes and amused anticipations—he to be manager of Donald Clerk's warehouse—he whom Donald Clerk had scolded so often—who had disturbed so many barrels and packages—made such havoc among bills and papers—scrambled in and out of so many scrapes and misadventures—he to be head of the establishment, supreme over the new boy and the porters ! Jamie laughed aloud with incredulous mirth.

And at eleven o'clock I left Mr. Middleton's office, and with an accelerated pulse and quickened step took my way towards the premises of Clerk and Fleck. The dusty bleak wind swept along the broad pavement of Princes Street, sharp upon the faces it met,

with its little spikes and pointed atoms of the March dust which might ransom kings—and an involuntary dry begrimeing came upon the face of royal Edinburgh—and to the cheeks of the lieges, errant in the windy streets. The warehouse of Messrs. Clerk and Fleck was not unlike the one in which myself began my mercantile novitiate; a great earthen floored, chill cellar below, to which some steps descended—as many up from the street, another large apartment, with a great heavy desk at the windows, a little den railed off in one corner, and the remaining space full of a wilderness of packed hams and cheeses, of vacant mats and straw, of fragrant barrels filled and empty, and boxes of miscellaneous gear. Well I knew the stance opposite the largest window, scribbled and covered with many a J. M. to testify its boyish tenantry, which was Jamie's place—and Donald himself sat throned behind the faded green curtains of the little den.

When I entered, Jamie put down somewhat nervously a bundle of invoices, and leaped from

his stool with some excitement. The red grizzled head, now considerably greyer than of old, looked out with keen investigation from behind the little railing ; but only a muttered " humph," and " some mair of that plaguit callant's friends," testified the consciousness of Donald Clerk.

We lingered a moment in whispering hesitation ; then, not without a tremor, Jamie advanced, and knocked a faltering knock at the little railed door which shut in the den. From the depths, the grizzled head made abrupt appearance again.

" Weel, laddie, what ails ye now ?"

And to my surprise the tones of Donald Clerk had a half-annoyed, half-derisive gentleness, entirely out of character with their usual growl. Yes, so it was—to steady. Well-doing, slow-paced and respectable, Donald might have preserved his gruffness—but our wild Jamie, reckless and joyous, with his gaiety, his blunders, his mischances serious and comic, had found out for this man that somewhere in his dusty bosom, a heart was beating still. Nothing

knew Jamie of his power—but Donald's tone betrayed the truth to me.

"My brother, Sir, come to speak to you," said Jamie.

"Ay, is this you?" said Donald, sharply, "and what's your will, my man, with me? Speak out, I've little time to spare."

There was space for no preface, neither had my wandering wits found anything at all practicable to give a formal introduction to the subject—so I made the plunge.

"Jamie says, Sir, you're likely to want a manager—" but I got no farther.

"How on earth does Jamie ken? am I like a donnert auld fule think ye, to gie up my concerns to another man's hands? Od, I would just like to try on a bit guid dry moorland what pith I have in my arm! Do you think ony twa of you southland brats would make a handful for me?"

And Donald laid a bony, gnarled hand, knotted with veins, hard and furrowed like a piece of oak, on the top of his railing, grasping

the frail bar with a strength which could have snapt it like a wand.

“But I mean no derogation to your vigour, Mr. Clerk,” said I, with a half smile, for my heart warmed to him whose heart had warmed unawares to our Jamie. “I am not brave enough to wish to test it; but Jamie said, or Jamie thought, you wanted a manager in spite of that.”

“And your wisdom was for recommending me to somebody,” said Donald, “maybe yourself, Mr. Gentleman Willie?—though Jamie should have better wit than to try a quiet callant in the road of me.”

“No,” said I, “Jamie’s turning a good age himself, and has a house to keep; besides, he’s been long in the warehouse and knows the business; we were thinking you might make him manager, Mr. Clerk.”

Donald shook himself vigorously, like a rough pony, and startled the echoes with a long “whew”. Then he took Jamie by the shoulder, griping him between his brown finger and

thumb, and drew him close to the railing to examine him, with grim derision.

“He’s coming to a good age is he? faither to a bairn, and bread-winner to a wife; and a crouse crawler in his ain barnyard, I’ll wager, garring his neighbours stand about. Do you hear me, bantam? is this a’ your ain assurance and conceit, or is’t made up with your gentleman brother? Dash’t! *you!* no a curve in your lassie cheeks, and setting up to manage *my* business—a laddie that’s been among my hands this half-dozen year; and you’re fit to take charge of the warehouse, are ye? another like thing, my braw lad, from taking a wife.”

But Jamie only laughed. I, looking on in my wisdom, felt he could have made no better reply.

“Besides,” added Donald, looking at me, “he’s a weirdless vagabone—he kens what I think of him—not a decent, steady laddie, keeping the main chance in his e’e, but a wild scapegrace of a fule, rinning after every will o’ the wisp that crosses his road. Haud your

peace, the twa o' ye ! Wha's to ken the nature of him, unless it's me ? Never an hour out of mischief—friends as weirdless as himsel—days of unthrift, nights of pleasure—is that the way for a man to gather and come to substance, think ye ? and am I to give the charge of *my* goods to a callant with naething in his head but fun and mischief, that never gies a thought either to win or keep his ain ?”

“But many a man is wise for other folk that is not wise for himself,” said I, sententially.

Donald put out another finger and thumb towards me, took me like a pinch of snuff, and dragged me also towards the light. The half-amused, deriding expression continued on his face—we two youths were playthings to Donald Clerk.

I did not feel the comparison very favourable ; standing side by side with Jamie, the partiality needed to be all in my favour before my grey and sober face could bear the contrast with his. But Donald, honest man, had no eye for beauty.

His thick red eyebrows curved upon us, his fiery hazel eyes glowed.

"Laddie," said Donald Clerk, "when did you come to be a man?"

Compliments have not fallen largely to my share at any time of my life, and I never received one, I think, which flattered me so much as this. I did not answer, otherwise than by an involuntary blush and little laugh of embarrassed pleasure, and slowly I was relieved from Donald Clerk's finger and thumb. I began to think Donald Clerk showed great discrimination, and was an excellent judge of character.

"Unless he was your brother, you would never think of advising me to put this laddie in a responsible place," continued Jamie's master, more seriously.

"For I could have no right to interfere," said I, feeling considerably dignified. "It is only because Jamie is my brother, that I take it upon me to speak to you at all."

Before I had ended, Donald's gaze returned

to Jamie. The gravity of his face relaxed a little, the smile began to play again about the corners of his mouth.

“And ye’ve nothing to say for yoursel, laddie?” said Donald, “no a word of good resolution to gar me listen to you. I’ll no say but what you have been a better bairn since ye had a wife to look after ye. Will you pass me your word to be steady and decent, and look well to the business if I take thought upon this? Will you give up a’ your wild acquaintances, ye young scapegrace, and grow an honest steady man for your ain behoof and your friends? or if ye’ll no, what am I to say to you, and to this grand gentleman here?”

“But I will,” said Jamie, with a little flush of offence, “and I’m as steady a man as there is in Edinburgh, now to begin with.”

The Aberdonian laughed a long low satirical laugh—Jamie’s little wraths and exasperations were clearly amusement to him.

But once more Donald turned from the rough sport, so strangely kind, of his deal-

ings with Jamie, to speak with more gravity to myself.

“Mostly for my own sake—part for his,” said Donald, “I’ll think this proposition over. It’s no a thing for a sensible business man to do, but I ken what’s in the laddie gey well mysel, and I’ll maybe let him get a fair trial. Take your time, my man, before ye give me thanks; wait till you hear what I have to say. I might be brought to loss out of my good nature. He kens himsel, there where he stands, how little he’s to be depended on—so for my ain sake I’ll need to take precautions. You get me security for three hundred pounds—ye couldna weel do more mischief than that would cover, Jamie—and I’ll take him on trial. Three—weel I’ll say two hundred and fifty, and I’ll no object to his father and another competent householder; no yoursel, Mr. Gentleman, for you’ve nae stake in the country yet, and might easy pay me with a moon-light flitting. Two hundred and fifty pounds security and his ain word and promise—no muckle

worth, weel I wot—to be steady and give up his wild friends—and I wouldna say but I'll put him in possession, and give him sixty pounds by the year before the fortnight's out."


Saying which, Donald's grizzled head disappeared abruptly within its little well of green curtains and railings; and immediately thereafter the sharp scratching of Donald's pen across the rough paper on which he wrote intimated to us that our audience was over.

I had no time to linger, even to hear the burst, half of anger and defiance, half of satisfaction and good pleasure, which Jamie came to the door to give vent to. My office hours had been unreasonably broken in upon, and I hurried away to my own employment.

CHAPTER V.

"BUT who can be security, Jamie, besides your father?" I heard Sybil put the question in a low alarmed tone as I entered the sitting-room.

Their conversation came to a close as I went in. Sibby was lulling her baby to sleep on her knee; Jamie, with the firelight glowing upon his golden brown hair, and slightly flushing his cheek, sat on a wooden stool before her. They were both very young, and strangely different in the attraction of appearance and look, which each possessed. Jamie ruddy, animated, boyish, full of activity and fresh vigour, pleasant as a green field to wearied eyes, calling forth at once



the superficial kindly sentiments which are the common property of human nature, and by the use and habit of his whole life-time, the conscious darling of his own home and friends. Sibby withdrawing half into the shadow—shy and of few words—pale, except when flushes of enthusiasm or emotion woke up her face into the animation of the poetic nature—a being capable of unspeakable loves and sorrows, yet chilled on the surface, reserved and downcast with the slowly disappearing effects of an uncherished youth. Here they sat in their consultation—the young mother's eyes only lifted from her child to fall on her young husband—and he, half seated, half kneeling by her knee, with the eager glow in his face, the kindled spirit on his cheek, and in his eye. They were taking counsel—and I think it was almost with a pang of envy that I sat down noiselessly by the other side of the table, endeavouring to make no interruption to the conversation which already had come to a temporary end.

“Did you hear Sibby's question?” said

Jamie, as he lighted the candle. "Do you think Andrew would do so much for anybody; but Andrew, I suppose, is like other folk—he would be suspicious of *me*."

Jamie said it with a slight tone of injury, but lightly. Sibby's face flushed almost purple—her lips quivered and swelled.

"Suspicious of you? no one dares to be that! Jamie, you do yourself an insult when you say such words!"

Jamie looked up with some little astonished laughter.

"I did not mean you to take it so seriously," he said; "I mean—Willie knows what I mean. They think I'm careless, Sibby, you know—not canny and prudent like Andrew himself—but we'll learn them better now."

Sibby's soft curved upper lip tightened itself upon the under one. Pain, and disdain of the suspicion, contended in her face with vexation that Jamie should treat it so lightly, and perhaps a shadow of distrust, saddest of all, lest it might peradventure have a foundation

of truth. But the baby had to be lifted softly up, upon her cradling arm, and transferred to Jamie's less graceful, but scarcely less tender care, while Sybil set her homely tea equipage in order. Then the little creature was re-transferred ; it was astonishing how much interest and importance attached themselves already to every fall and elevation of its small eyelids, every stretch of its minute arm. True the baby no longer threw everything and everybody into complete insignificance, but its shadow still held us in comparative obscurity ; there was still a partial and permanent eclipse.

" Andrew must do it," said I, " we could ask no one else, at least till he had refused. Go yourself to-morrow night and ask him, Jamie."

Jamie shrugged his shoulders.

" Do you not think I could write or get my mother to speak to Andrew—or you might do it, when you go home on Saturday night ? I don't like, myself."

Another little burst of impatience came from Sybil.

"I wish I only would. I could not care about liking. Will you let me, Jamie?"

But I very much doubted Sibby's success as a negotiator with Andrew—I interposed again.

"My mother, perhaps, can do it best; only tell her yourself. Why cannot we all go out together on Saturday. My mother wanted you last week, Sibby."

Sibby hesitated—for the coach fare was something—and Sibby was half afraid that she could not walk so far as between Moulisburgh and Ailieford.

It was thus settled, however; and tea being over, my books were collected on the table, Sibby got her seam, and Jamie fell to rocking the cradle. My Latin suffered considerable interruption, I am bound to confess, from the subdued half heard conversation between them, whispered over the baby's little couch, which kept my ear involuntarily attracted, intent to follow the indistinct words. I begged Jamie at last to speak out, that I might not be tantalized by the perpetual whispering, and my

entreaty won for me full five minutes' complete silence ; but Jamie could hold out no longer, and would not be prevailed upon to "disturb" Willie by speaking out—so the greater disturbance of his under-tones returned upon me, and I submitted with a sigh.

Two days intervened between us and Saturday, and on the evening of each Jamie brought home a new piece of intelligence, dazzling us into great interest and breathless anxiety about Andrew's willingness to undertake the suretyship. For Donald Clerk, divided between the unusual partiality for Jamie, of which himself was half ashamed, and the natural and habitual parsimony of his daily dealings, doled out his liberality bit by bit, as if he felt his dignity in danger of compromise. First came a vague promise of rooms above the warehouse, to enable the young manager to take better care of his employer's goods and chattels—and then there followed shadowy intimation of some additional annual sum to keep a servant, who should do the weekly duty of sweeping this same ware-

house out. All three of us started for Moulisburgh on Saturday, full of excitement. My mother met us there by appointment—and leaving Jamie with her, to lay siege to our prudent elder brother, Sybil and I set out slowly upon the Ailieford road. It was twilight, and though only the second day of April, softening skies and coming verdure told that Spring was here in earnest now. A faint green had stolen upon the brown hedges, little leaves just peeping from the husks which held them . still, and the herbage at their feet was rich and dewy, full of promise of the wild flowers already secretly putting forth their folded petals under the grass. We walked slowly, partly for Sybil's weakness—partly that we might be overtaken soon—but the half hour which we had spent in Andrew's house, occupied, as it was, by the exhibition of the baby, and the half laudatory, half jealous remarks of one young mother to the other, had evidently been quite insufficient for the more solemn mission of Jamie and my mother. Closely wrapped in

her own shawl, and under that covered and cloaked with many a mysterious wrapping Sybil carried her child—refusing with unvarying negatives my proposal to relieve her of her load. Sibby was impatient and anxious—quickenning her pace at one moment unawares, at another falling into the lingering steps of reverie ; many a time in meditative mood had Sibby wandered under these self-same trees, but very strangely must the tone of her thoughts have changed—no vague fair dreamings full of the charm of old romance—only a real intense anxiety about a few more pounds a-year—for altogether when you counted them, there was so little in this wished for twenty pounds.

We were near Ailieford, before steps and voices behind made us turn to wait for the close approach of Jamie and my mother. They were both considerably excited, hot and eager, and talking more than usual. Andrew had consented ; but not till he had grievously disappointed and wounded my mother, who had never doubted his instant willingness to do all

that was necessary for Jamie's advancement. Andrew's prudent demurrings, his doubt whether it was consistent with "his duty to his own family," made a strong impression upon my mother. "His ain family!" she echoed, with a bitter laugh of derision; but under the laugh I could hear a sob as bitter, out of her heart. She never forgot these words; they might be very allowable words, legitimate and proper, but they made a wound in the spirit of my mother, which nothing could ever heal again.

We were contented, however, and Sybil and I, out of the fray ourselves, softened and justified Andrew, till I, who best knew the temper we had to deal with, drew up suddenly in no more than sufficient time to save myself from sharing the grieved displeasure he had called forth. But Andrew *had* consented; there now remained nothing but the bond to secure Jamie his situation: and Sybil and my mother were soon lost in consultation as to the furnishing of the free house which Donald Clerk had

graciously promised them. This was a serious question, and resulted at last in nothing more satisfactory than my mother's recommendation "to be doing," with the very simplest foundation of necessities at first, and add to it as opportunity served. With this, there being nothing else possible, Sibby magnanimously declared herself content; and thereafter the conversation, for all this time artificially diverted from its natural subject, the baby, returned in a stream to its proper channel, and Jamie's appointment with all its prospective grandeur and comforts, faded into obscurity, a *fait accompli*—a thing achieved and laid aside.

Within the fortnight he had entered on his new duties. Donald Clerk, in his vigour and energy, was not to retire and be shelved so quietly as we supposed; but with his legacy he bought a coalpit very near his house, which happened to be within a short distance of Ailieford. Donald was his own factor and superintendant there, and soon had abundant occupation, so that but for the fretting week or

two which followed Jamie's inauguration to the little curtained den, he was little troubled with the visits of his employer. The upper flat of the house, which had the warehouse for its ground story, contained three rooms, one of them of great size. Living in Princes Street in one's own house was a very different thing from living in lodgings in the South Back of the Canongate; but our settee, the table, and half a dozen chairs, which Sybil achieved for its furniture, looked very scanty and insufficient in the great room. Its large lofty windows looked out to the back, over the abrupt valley between the old and new town, to ancient Edinburgh itself in all its antique pomp and grace; and there Sybil sat on these lengthened spring gloamings, watching how the lights rose in the lines of windows which surveyed us from the edge of the old town, and how the sentinels farther off upon the watch towers of heaven stepped forth one by one to their place. There is a certain strange magic in surveying things from on high as we did in our lofty habitation.

The atmosphere itself carried news to us of all the sweet expanding graces which dwell in the heart of Spring. The little monthly rose, from home, in its pot upon the window-sill, grew fragrant with the morning and evening dew—and the sound of the gay streets, of the North Bridge close at hand, and the crowded thoroughfare on the other front of the house came to us with a musical hum, remote and dreamy, as if we were half asleep. Then, wrapped in all the manifold hazes which dwell about its noble eminence—hazes of morning sunshine, of evening mist, of floating noonday smoke, a cloudy banner gorgeous with embroideries of golden light—how grand at all times was the outline before us of old Edinburgh with its high roofs and spires and battlements; and this valley, hushed and dim, lying far down at its feet. It was dangerous for my books to be taken to the window—dangerous for Sybil's work—and it has even seemed to me in many a golden morning, when the light streamed down in visible rays, a very mist and

bewilderment of brightness, that the steady line of rock and roof swayed with the sunshine, and went and came in wavering form, always grand and picturesque yet always changing, as though itself too were a magical vision and dream. Far off is the little breakfast-table in the centre of the great low-roofed room—for we are close upon the leads, and our ceiling slopes towards the other end—opposite the fire-place, where Sybil boils the kettle and makes tea. The cradle sways under Jamie's hand, as he sits by the fireside speaking in a voice which the distance subdues. The little bed-room beyond this apartment is all aglow with morning sunshine ; but from the window I look out, through the sober, dewy shade, upon St. Giles' Crown, lined and tipped and glistening with little jewel points and tracery of gold ; upon dark windows flashing back the light which falls down like a misty, glittering garment into the valley, covering the feet of the great, gorgeous, antique personage, fronting us from this height. There is a little time to expend before office hours,

and the inevitable business-day begins, and in our lofty atmosphere we dwell as on the top of a hill, and all the city, tranced and dreaming, lies before us like a city of the clouds.

Meanwhile Sybil's baby, our small Elizabeth, day by day grows older, and begins to charm us by recognitions, by crows of infant rapture, and the cooing dovelike murmur of infant comfort. It almost seems to me as I regard them sometimes, that the soul out of Sibby's dark blue eyes is stealing into the baby's face—that the one heart already has tinged and touched the other with its own fervid nature, and that the mother brooding over the child, is communicating to it a gift as perilous and great as the prophet's mantle, her own mind and spirit, her emotions, aspirations, dreams. I think of the pure pitcher at the fountain—the little pebbled channel by the mountain spring—and it seems to me that there is no new individuality for this little one, but that she must be filled out of her mother's heart, and accomplish her mother's fate.

And Jamie goes on very well in the warehouse below, and has no small authority over the two strong porters, with whom he is the most popular manager who ever held office in depute. If the young clerk is a little less easily kept in order, it is because he feels himself very nearly as old as Jamie, and is slightly ashamed to yield to the authority which he cannot contest. But Jamie keeps his promise stoutly—is as “steady” as heart of Donald Clerk could desire; and has given up without a murmur his objectionable friends. In good heart with himself and with his fate, Sybil can hear him whistling in his little den, singing as he comes and goes up the stairs—and despite her tribulations about furniture, happy is Sybil’s rising up and lying down, blessed her mornings and her evenings. Spring without and Spring within—love enough to content her craving, and all the gentle charities to edge and refine, and sanctify out of burning passion this wife and mother love. Ah! Sybil, sister,

poor heart ! we will pause and take breath, you and I, before our trouble comes.

For I too go on cheerily with my studies, and flatter myself that I become a very tolerable Latin scholar, great in verbs and nouns, victorious over "Virgil" and "Horace," and even secretly doing a little at Greek, with a private "Homer" of my own, looked at occasionally with awe and excitement, and not so perfectly dark and hieroglyphical now as he was a month since. Very true I am beguiled sometimes to sit idle for a whole hour by the window, when the castle rises dark against the setting sun ; and that I have read unnecessary books now and then the whole night through with secret guilt and self-reproach. Nevertheless the studies make progress. And Mary Burnet writes me sober, good-humoured letters, full of her natural sense and contentment, encouraging me after her quiet, undemonstrative fashion. I have come to be content with these letters, though they are very unlike love-letters still—but I

myself make up for all in my own response.

And so the days come and go, the sunshine brightens, the summer comes—summer with its lights and shadows, its falling blossoms and its ripening fruits ; one seed time is over for all of us, and the harvest is to come.

CHAPTER VI.

IN March Mary Burnet had gone to Glasgow—it was July, and wanted but two months until the time of her promised return. My own wish to engage my future school-room at the “term,” and begin operations at once had been overruled. This beginning was put off till autumn, and Mary was to have some weeks of quiet and preparation with my mother at Ailieford before the day which gave us one fate. But all the other preliminaries were arranged, and it was with a throb at my heart that I looked forward over the weeks and days which intervened now between me and the beginning of my independent life.

My mother had already begun to make such preparations as were in her power. I was not her favourite son, but I had remained by her and clung to her when both Andrew and Jamie failed; now it was true I found her somewhat dreary sometimes—wiping secret tears out of the corner of her eyes, and thinking of the close approaching time when Saturday night would fail to bring me home for the Sabbath-day rest—but these lonely reflections did not slacken the pace of her flying needle, nor diminish her interest in any small particular—and the particulars were all small—of my start in life. Yes, we were very limited, very contracted, attaching an importance to twenty shillings which twenty pounds would fail to find in the eyes of many a young bridegroom of sufficiently moderate means. We, the whole family of us, had no possession but our little yearly incomes—the daily rations of necessity—and “settling in life,” as my mother called it, was no easy matter to us.

In July, Jamie, fulfilling his duties as Donald

Clerk's manager, made a journey to Glasgow anent certain purchases for the warehouse ; he was three days away, and arriving wearied late on the evening of the third, had a story to tell us on which I listened to with deepening interest, gradually flushing into excitement. But Jamie did not see the importance of his narrative as concerning me, so he mixed up particulars which made my heart throb and swell, with little memorandums about west country provisions and bits of acquired information interesting to no one but Donald Clerk.

"This was the most important part of my business," said Jamie, triumphantly concluding his report of the purchase of a cargo of Ayrshire cheeses, "and then I thought I might go and look at the town ; but the Clyde at Glasgow is nothing to speak of—if it were not for the ships, you would never think of giving it a second look ; and as for the Broomielaw—"

"Was it there you met Mary Burnet," said I, impatiently.

"There ? no—man. Willie, have patience !

I'll come to that by-and-bye. Mary was up in the Trongate—and it's no more like Princes Street, Sibby, than the High Street of Moulisburgh. Well, then, I'll tell you about Mary first. She was walking with her cousin—he's as old as you, Willie, I should think, and looks well enough for a Glasgow man. I was quite startled when I saw it was Mary ; but there she was, after the first surprise, just as quiet and sensible as if I had met her between her own house and ours on the Ailieford road. She asked for Sibby and the bairn, and she asked for my mother ; of course I did not expect, with the stranger there beside her, that she would like to ask for you. So I said Willie was very well, and very busy, and looking for the time. Then her face flushed a little, and she held down her head for a moment, the cousin turning away impatiently, and playing with his glove. And then Mary asked what you were doing. I said, I understood you had come a great length with your Latin, but had time enough to look at lighter books for all that

sometimes, and now and then gave Sibby two or three hours' reading when I was busy, and that you were not working too hard nor hurting yourself. She said that was right, but with a troubled look—her cousin all the time biting his lip, and flirting his glove in his face. Then we stood and looked at each other for a moment, not knowing what to say—I am always that way with people I meet in the street; and Mary wavered a while, looking as if *she* wanted to say something, but could not get it out, and so we said good-day, and parted. I never could fathom Mary Burnet, Willie—she never was like Sibby there, for instance—but that was all the conversation we had.”

“I think I could fathom her more easily than Sibby,” said I, with an attempted jest—but unawares, and without any other than the fantastic reason of Mary's reported look of trouble, a heaviness and oppression came to my heart.

This continual suspicion and distrust of me—this reluctance to permit to me the natural

self-responsibility of a full-grown man, began to irritate, or rather began to rouse into almost positive anger the dormant irritation of past times. On the previous night, I had written to Mary one of my usual half journal letters; and as the unfortunate chance would have it, had described one of these same novel readings to Sibby, which done out of pure regard to her solitude were anything but fit causes of reproach to me. I wrought myself into a tolerable state of excitement that night—wondering, surmising, imagining the course which Mary would pursue. I know not what impelled me to the certainty, but I felt persuaded that something would follow upon Jamie's report of me; and angry with Jamie, fretted, vexed, and irritated with my betrothed and myself, I went away in a concealed ferment to my necessary rest.

But Mary's next letter gave me no real cause for my premature annoyance. It was shorter perhaps, than usual, but contained all that Mary's letters usually contained. Still, I

managed to extract some drops of gall out of the clear, sensible, smoothly-written page. Not the faintest reference did Mary make to the return of which I had fondly spoken as her “coming home;” and what were her aunt and her cousins to me?

The next was the same, and so was the next—short, but Mary was busy and had little time, and she told me of her work—her constant occupation—and again of her cousins and her aunt. August had spent a fortnight by this time, and Mary was to leave Glasgow in the end of September. My discontent and suspense fretted me like a secret girdle of penance. If she had at all mentioned her encounter with Jamie, I might have believed the whole affair over; but she never had—and I grew impatient, capricious, ill-humoured, waiting for this, which I knew was sure to come.

In the middle of August it came. I felt, when I opened the sober missive put up carefully by hands that never faltered, that something

more than usually important was in its full pages ; and I withdrew to my own apartment to undergo Mary's letter.

“ My dear Willie,

“ I met your brother, two or three weeks ago, here in Glasgow. I have never mentioned it, because I did not want to vex you ; but many a thought it has cost me since. He said no ill of you, and meant none—you need not be angry at him ; but he brought back thoughts that I had put away ever since my father's death. You were very kind then, Willie, and were a great comfort to me, and so was your mother. There is no doubt it was nothing but a duty that you would both have done to anybody in distress ; but I felt it very kind to me, and it is only now hearing of you from another person again, that my old thoughts have come back into my mind.

“ When we first spoke about this I was only very young, and so were you. It is nearly two years since now—and I was lonely and solitary,

and very glad to have somebody to care for me. You may say it was rash and thoughtless of me, but I never considered whether we were suitable to one another, or if your mind was like mine, or if we would agree in the things which make up life. I thought of nothing but just that you liked me, and that I had known you ever since you were a boy, and that I liked you myself, Willie, and was glad, very glad in my heart to have a right to somebody's kindness, and a claim to be thought of, and cared for, whatever might happen to me. And Christian Bell was just married, and had got a house of her own—I knew I could manage a house better than she could, and thought I should like very well to have one—but I did not think of that either till after I got home. So we made it up, Willie, and I am sure I believe you were as anxious to do well for me as you were for yourself—and for my part I believed every thing you said about what you could do as firmly as I believe the Bible.

“We went on for a time, and you were always telling me what was to come. But nothing ever came, Willie. When the year was out, you were just as you were—and though you said you would make chances and opportunities, you never did, and I saw you just content to remain where you were, and lose your time with unprofitable fancies, and I thought to myself what would he be if he had a family to keep him down. I had very near made up my mind then to tell you we had better give up thoughts of this, but my father turned very ill, and it was just about the time you had so much trouble with your brother’s marriage—I did not want to be rash a second time, I wanted to take good thought—and well I knew what a dreadful thing for the family was irregular habits in a man—and what a hard thing it was to be a poor man’s wife with an appearance to keep up, for I had plenty experience of such things ; only you always spoke so sensible, and seemed to understand so well—

and then you were aye so confident of what you could do yourself.

“Then my father came to be worse and worse till he died, and in the time of my trouble you were very kind, and very good to me, Willie—and so you were when I came away. I will not deny either that seeing you so kind, and coming away suddenly among strangers, who knew little about me, and did not care much, it was a great consolation to think of you, and all my old feelings came back, and I was just glad in simplicity to think that you cared for me, and forgot all about what was prudent. Then I thought of you working busy at your studies, and making yourself fit for a teacher, and I knew I never could be anybody’s wife without doing all I could to help, and that I would have better opportunity then, than if you were just in an office—so I pleased myself with these thoughts and was very content.

“But if you are not making the most of your time after all—if you have still leisure for

reading and pleasure, which I never could get all my days—we are just as far from a right issue as ever, and I must make use of my freedom, as long as I have it, and look to myself. You know well enough what kind of a person I am ; that I never was caring about your poetry like Sibby Wood, but always liked what was sensible and true. We are only engaged and can go back, either one or the other if we think it best ; if we were more than engaged—if everything was settled, and it was out of my power to make any change I know that I would put my mind to it, and maybe make a better fortune out of it, than I can see any chance of now ; but I've had a fight and a struggle all my life—I have never been done contending with poverty and trouble since I knew what they were—and I am not content, Willie Mitchell, either for your sake, or any other man's, to go with my eyes open into another battle that may last me all my life. Whatever situation I go into, I never could be satisfied if I did not do everything

that belonged to it as well as I could ; but that is a different thing from choosing a painful and hard one when the choice is in my power. I will be grieved if this makes you melancholy or hurts you in the world—besides that it is very wrong to quarrel with providence whatever it sends—but I think it is my duty both for my own sake and yours, to break our engagements and say you are free. I would like to be always very good friends with you if you would let me—but I would not like you to agitate yourself or vex me by trying to change my mind. I have made up my mind very carefully and deliberately, and I am sure it will turn out well for us both, so there remains nothing but to say I will always think thankfully of how kind you were in my trouble, and how good your mother was—and to thank you with all my heart. I hope you will do well, and succeed still in your new plan, and get scholars, and a house, and a wife more suitable than me—and I am sure I will be as glad to hear of your doing well as if it was to be for

my own advantage. I am to continue still at my uncle's, having spoken to him of what I have fixed upon, and I am very comfortable now, and nothing to complain of—so I bid you kindly good-bye.

“MARY BURNET.”

I read it very calmly, with self-possession and command as great as her own—read it, and accepted it with cool and desperate passion—for I remember catching a glimpse in my glass of a white face with knitted brow and parted lips, and something in its expression which made me think of fiends and demons. But this mood could not last; I read it over again—I crushed it in my hand, I gnashed my teeth; it seemed to me in a moment that my tender love died out of my heart, and indignant hatred took its place. Mary! Mary! light of my eyes—desire of my heart—whom my soul had lifted up and idolized, and rejoiced in, since ever my boy's spirit could be conscious of the

the man's strong love that matured it—Mary—but nature and sound in a moment had become untuneable, and music was no more in the word which once had condensed all melody for me.

I gave her up on the instant without a pause or doubt; nothing impelled me to rush to her again and overplead her harsh dismissal—nothing in my heart prompted me to take the petitioner's place once more. I went out avoiding every one, with rage and malignant purpose strong within me; burning to injure, to harm, to retaliate upon some other the cruel injustice practised to myself. Gentle as my usual humour was, I rushed through the streets a half-conscious madman to-day, thrusting aside astonished wayfarers with a frenzied disregard of every mechanical courtesy which gave myself strange pleasure. I had suddenly become free of the ordinary bondage of the world; it seemed to me that I owed gratitude to none, kindness to none, and that only so far as I could insult,

and harm, and hinder, did I pay my dues to the race. Emancipated from all the restraints of ordinary nature, I thirsted to lift my hand against every man, longed for power and license to strike, and hurt, and maim ; and was in my heart during the period of this possession, a fierce and savage demoniac, a wild beast, crafty and cruel, revelling in the very idea of destruction. But the power did not second the will, and I could retaliate and revenge my injuries upon no one but myself.

Upon myself I did revenge them ; unable to injure any other, no mortal could take out of my hands the absolute power I had of injuring *me*. When I left the office, where I could not be other than harmless, I hurried away to the lowest quarters of the city, into dens where Jamie's wildest outbreaks had never carried him, and made the plunge unhesitatingly into the very mire and dismal swamp of vice. No dainty sip or trial of the poisoned cup—no timid step adventured over the margin of the precipice, but a deep, down, headlong, steady


plunge, over mind and consciousness, over heart and soul.

Oh, night of nights, most terrible and hopeless! Oh! sinner, conscious, wilful, undeceived! my very heart and frame revolted at the base pleasures into which I dragged them, and sickened at the draught held to their lips. Yet it was swallowed wildly, adding a meaner madness to the first—a young man, simple and pure-minded, with dews of youth upon me, I burst into this self-imposed ordeal. I came out of it waking in horror and abasement on a glorious summer morning, scorched and seared as with infernal fires, ripe with miserable maturity; my eyes opened—my shame upon me for ever.

And it was no dream, no fit of fever, or nightmare, or ghostly delusion. Looks and tones, words and faces go with me still, and will go with me all my life, vouching with frightful distinctness to the reality of that night's vice, as if they had been with me yesterday. I recollect them—see them still, for

they are with me to-day ; and shooting across the purest joyance, the most innocent pleasures of all my life, a word, a tone, a gesture has brought before me with a pang unutterable—brought before me visible and present, a picture, bright, like Belshazzar's warning on the wall—the horrors of this tragic era, this wilful degradation of my life.


I dared not adventure myself within sight of Jamie or presence of Jamie's wife. I fled out of the place in which I found myself, to the remote and silent hollows of Arthur's Seat, lying in deep, cold, dewy shadow under the peaks which glowed with early sunshine. Then I fell upon my face, burrowing in the long wet grass, which pressed upon my feverish forehead like fingers of some wistful innocent beholder, marvelling at a misery unknown. When I hid the daylight from my eyes, the fair awakening world from my morbid senses, I felt a momentary relief—but heaven and earth could not hide me—could not hide the fresh



heaped-up accumulated evil, the sore, unsolaced remorse which lay defenceless and unveiled under the skies ; open for ever to the Righteous Eye above, and to my own.

CHAPTER VI.

STRONG habit and necessity—the instinct which prevails with its daily use and wont over all human miseries—carried me at the usual hour to the office. Such a night could not have failed to leave traces upon me more than were effaceable by the dew and fresh air of the hill; but I had been so unblameable in this respect hitherto that no one noticed—at least in words—my unsteady hand and soiled dress. I had not been long at my desk when I saw Jamie's wistful anxious face approaching the open door—where had I been? He looked in my face with painful curiosity—he had been



sitting up, waiting for me, all night, and they were very anxious—had I been home ?

I said, no, abruptly, and forbade farther questions—I could not bear them—though Jamie looked humble and alarmed, anything but an inquisitor or judge of my doings. But I shrank from my younger brother—the boy whom I had guarded, warned, taken care of—with the bitterest shame ; I could not bear him to know, and I was harsh, repulsive, proud. Jamie went away greatly bewildered, looking back still with anxiety and wistfulness, and it did not occur to me, self-conscious as I was, that Jamie's suspicions must point to anything but the truth—that it would be quite impossible for him to surmise the real guiltiness which was so inconsistent with my whole previous life.

In the evening I went home—home to the room where Sybil, like a young Madonna, bent over her child. She did not suspect me either but was wistful and sympathetic, full of eager attention and sisterly tenderness. I was a mystery to both—they could not comprehend

what unknown evil afflicted me ; but Sibby had quick perception, and asked me no questions, whereas Jamie, less delicate, drove me half mad again with his mistaken solicitude. I put my dress in order, bathed my flushed face to cool it, swallowed at a draught the tea set before me, and went out again, not to renew the frantic dissipation of last night, but to wander about the cheerful streets, to throw myself in the way of the little gaieties usual to my class, to forget and bury myself out of my sight ; this had become my leading object now—my own disgrace and self-humiliation had for the moment almost obliterated their cause. It was not to forget Mary I laboured, but to get rid of this continual conscious wakeful self-desecrated *me*.

But as the days passed, feverish and solitary, in an utter hermit seclusion of thought and feeling into which no one intruded—the natural process wrought upon me and my feelings changed. I grew wearied of my fever—I longed for quietness and rest. Silent, self-

absorbed, and uncommunicative as I had grown I saw myself a restraint upon Jamie and Sybil, when I again resumed my place in the window, and gave up my long evening absences ; they had got used to talking of me while I was away—to wondering what ailed or had befallen me—and this conversation so interested both, that now when it had to be abruptly closed, silence and constraint fell upon them. Jamie went out leaving me alone with Sybil, and Sybil sitting silent at her work, cast wistful looks at me as I put away my Latin books in a corner, and piled them out of sight ; but something of reverence for me was in Sybil's heart, and she never disturbed the silence which I chose to maintain.

But I could not share the solitude and quietness of this long room into which the setting sunshine slanted, with her alone. I went away to my own little chamber to sit down there sullen and self-absorbed, and stupify myself with a maze of thoughts. Distinct they were not, any of them—but all were feverish desires after

things unattainable—wild torrents of fierce longing, imaginations, intoxicating and unreal, with neither truth nor consistency in them. At this time I shrank with sensitive pain from truth—clung to my delusions, wrapped myself up in my injury—and common life with all its softening charities and individual claims, came to look like a bondage unbearable. I would be free, the one disconnected irresponsible man, at liberty to brood upon my wrong and to revenge it.

It was twilight when I went into our sitting-room again. From the kitchen I heard the low croon of Sybil's servant, singing as she hushed the baby; but Sybil herself was not here. Her work lay on the window sill, where she had put it down, and the book Jamie had been reading was thrown on the little table. A strange presentiment of evil stole upon me; but what was evil to me? I closed my sullen heart against it, and sat down to fold my arms and abstract myself once more. Nothing disturbed me. The door was closed; the blank

lines of wall grew dim in the twilight darkness ; and I myself, immoveable on my chair, lessened and faded, till the gloom grew unconscious of my presence, and settled down upon me in sable silence, undisturbed by a breath or motion of restless human life.

I think an hour of this darkness must have passed, when a faint candle flashed in at the opened door, and Sybil, with eager eyes of investigation, looked in, scrutinizing the gloom. She herself, still wore her out-door dress, and the face, over which her veil hung, had dark lines in it, thin and almost haggard, and a great paleness. " Is it you, Jamie ? " she said eagerly ; for my face was towards the window, and I was far from her, at the other end of the room.

" No," said I. Sybil came in, and set down the candle on the table. It burned there unheeded—a faint, ineffectual light, brightening the surface of the table, but throwing the walls into deeper shadow ; and I sat undisturbed by the uncovered window, with all the faint, gleaming,

evening skies open to my careless look, and all the world of darkened air which interposed between.

Sybil came again to resume her work beside the table ; but Jamie did not come. I was not sufficiently roused to wonder or be anxious, and even the commonest intercourse of words had so fallen into disuse between us, that I took no notice of her, sitting there in her solitude. By-and-bye, I gathered up my sullen self and went away to my room again with a half said good-night—to my dark room, where I chose to have no light, and where another hour of dreary half-stupified meditation ushered in a night of dull, lethargic rest. But I heard no sound in the house, except faint, stealthy steps on the passage without, and in the little closet with its skylight window, which was next to my room. I never heard the entrance of Jamie.

It was nearly a month now since my own fever began, and night after night passed in this fashion. Jamie went out, Sybil went out,

I had possession of the desolate room by myself; and when I retired to my own, again and again I became faintly conscious of footsteps stealing to my door—of something stirring in the closet—of the window softly opened that some one might look out. My wonder began to be roused a little, my attention attracted; but not enough to break through the crust of sullen silence which had grown upon me.

Sitting idle and vacant thus in the deserted room which Jamie had left immediately after tea, and from which Sybil had newly gone, I was suddenly aroused by a loud summons at the door, a rough voice in the passage; and before I could wake myself out of my gloomy reverie, Donald Clerk came in upon me, his foot echoing over the uncarpeted margin of the room. The Aberdonian's fiery hazel eye looked red and lurid; his brows lowered upon them more heavily than usual, and a hot, red spot of anger was on his cheek. With his heavy, swinging footstep, he advanced unhesitatingly

up the long, bare wall to where I sat. "It's you!" said Donald Clerk, and mortification and disappointment were in his tone.

I made no answer—keeping my seat vacantly, I only looked at him with scarce a passing wonder as to what might bring him here.

"Where is the laddie?" said Donald, "who is it now that's been leading him astray? what's come of him that I can neither find him in the warehouse, nor hear a good account of him? Do you hear me speaking, Mr. Gentleman, or are you dazed or daft or out of yoursel as well as him? Od, I would think little to pack the whole tribe of you away!"

"I do not know where my brother is—out somewhere, I fancy," said I, looking as indifferent as five minutes ago I felt; but already my veins began to tingle, my blood to warm, my heart to resume its old interest in Jamie.

"They tell me he is to be seen morning and night in the streets; they tell me he is squandering siller which I ken he has not of

his ain," thundered Donald. "Where is he, I say? and what kind of a life is that for a married man, the manager of my warehouse, to live in Edinburgh? I want admission to my books? I want to see what's wrong with my own e'en. Do you hear me, you young vacant gowk? where is the laddie? or somebody to let me into my own office to see the state of my affairs."

"My brother, I suppose, is out," I repeated. "I have been busy and absorbed myself. I cannot tell where he is—but you must either wait or be content to see him again—he is not in, and I can tell you nothing more."

Donald threw himself heavily upon the creaking old settee; he was in a state of considerable excitement, and settled himself upon his seat as if resolved to wait.

"What kind of a life has he been leading? ye'll ken that; has he been attending to my business honestly, and coming home regular to his meals, and living in peace with his wife. Dash't! canna ye look a man in the face that

takes the trouble to speak to you? What's the meaning of wandering e'en, and a dazed look like that. I suppose you've begun to turn down the braid road yoursel."

I made no answer. Reality was gradually wakening upon me, cold and sober; but I could not bring life and animation to my blanched cheek, and wild eye.

"You shall make but one step from here to yonder if ye put me daft this way," exclaimed Donald starting up to seize my collar. "Speak, canna you!—ae thing or anither whatever ye have to say. If I lose my hard won siller or my credit through your weirdless brother, is that a reason that I should be driven to lose temper and patience with the like of you? Ay, I'll shake ye, an atomy of smooth skin, and sma' bones as ye are. Wha are you to stand in my gate? Do you hear? I'll rattle the breath out of ye, unless ye speak."

I started to my feet, and with a desperate exertion, loosened his hand from my collar. He had made me as fierce as himself, and all

my bitterness and world hatred concentrated in a moment into a drop of gall which would not be kept within the heart that produced it.

“Be quiet and leave me,” said I, with the calmness of passion, “or take your seat there and tell me what you want. What are you that I should bear your insults, or what do you think you can care for your miserable money in comparison with my regard for my brother? what has he done—what have you the presumption to suspect him of? Sit down, I tell you, and let me know. Your money! your credit! and you think you may come to me in a frenzy about such miserable trifles, when my brother’s very life and youth and good name may be involved. Sit down, Sir, and render an account to me. It is I who have the most desperate interest in this! What have you suspected? what do you know?”

Donald Clerk sat down beside me in the window; his great frame had a thrill of suppressed excitement, and I was shivering all over

mine. The twilight began to close upon us as we sat in the half gloom, looking into each other's eyes, duellists roused and wound up to the fever point. He took my hand as it rested on the window, and crushed it in his own powerful fingers. I had to bite my lip to keep down a cry of pain.

"What a man has, he prizes," said Donald Clerk; "if I had a brother, a young lad in peril, I might turn to desperation for his sake too; but what I have is credit and gear—money and credit—and it behoves me to hold a grip of my belongings, such things as they are. They're mine—I put my score and mark on few other things in this world; but what I do possess, mind you, I do possess with all my power and might, and no man shall put them in danger, if he was the man in this world most cherished of friends, without my endeavour done to visit back upon him the ill he had wrought to me. Do you hear what I say? It's nought to me that I have mysel petted Jamie, and made a fule of him with kindness, or that he's been a

spoiled bairn a' his days and is little else yet, though he's coming to a man's years. I tell ye, I think nought of what he is—nought of the favour I have had for him—I tramp them down under my feet as I would tramp a worm ; and mercy or charity ye will find none in me if I find my trust betrayed !”

“I knew that, though you had not told me,” said I, with some scorn ; “and mercy or charity I never thought to ask at your hands. But you have not answered my question. What right have you to suspect my brother ? what title to think that we should be reduced to ask mercy from you.”

Donald laughed grimly. “Since ye defy me, my braw man, ye shall find that out at your own hand—and take you care, laddie, that it's no such a finding out as will silence your bit brag of a tongue all its days. Answer you me—where is Jamie Mitchell ? I want in to my own office—I want to examine my own affairs. If you're no involved and implicate with him, or if you have not better reason than me to

ken him a defaulter, what good can it do you to keep him out of sight. Deliver me up the keys or bring me to speech of Jamie, and I'll acquit you of blame ; but if you can tell me neither reason nor cause to keep him out of my road, except the one, I'll say I have a good right to my suspicion."

"Jamie is out—so is his wife," said I ; "they may be walking together ; but what they are doing, or where they have gone, I am quite ignorant of. That they had not the slightest apprehension of your visit, I know ; wait, if you choose, till they return. It is a thing quite indifferent to me, as it is to them, I fancy. Wait till Jamie comes himself to satisfy you—I can have nothing to say about affairs which I know nothing of."

Our conversation ended. Grim and fiery, moving on his seat now and then with a half-writhing motion like a tiger collecting all its powers for a spring, Donald Clerk kept his place before me. Lurid and fierce were the red hazel eyes, gleaming in fitful glances over the

windowsill and floor ; and his strong eyebrows rose and fell continually. Something so fierce, so ruthless and savage was in his whole appearance that my fears gradually rose. I felt that this man's very partiality for Jamie made Jamie's case a hopeless one if he had, indeed, put himself in his employer's power—for it was this—and the sharp pang of disappointed regard and unrealized expectation which gave intensity to Donald's wrath. He had determined to do service to Jamie, and woe to the unhappy boy if he himself made these intentions vain—for Donald could not bear to fail.

As we sat thus facing each other, perfectly unoccupied, except with our thoughts, perfectly silent, self-absorbed, yet cognizant, and keenly watchful, each of every motion of the other, all my selfish broodings fascinated and spell-bound, seemed to die in my heart. I sat intently listening, intently watching, as I have heard of desperate men lying prostrate before the lion who will not touch a motionless enemy.

Gradually as these slow rustling moments came past us, each on its deliberate wing, my heart sickened and shuddered at every echo on the stair. I felt that the man beside me heard every sound as distinctly as I did—that it was impossible to warn, impossible to prevent the entrance of Jamie if he should come home now—and though I knew nothing which gave me warrant to suspect my brother, this watch was enough to fill me with a vague agony of terror. And the hollow echoing stone stair-case without rang with innumerable footsteps, and sounds past counting. One after another came, step by step, nearer our door, and the relief with which I heard them stop on the landing-place below came to me at last like a positive pang.

The darkness gathered, deepened, till I at last lost sight of everything except the large outline beside me, with its curved shoulders, and stooping head. Lights began to rise in the windows of the old town, and lamps to be lighted about the streets. We were too high to catch a gleam from any of them, and the

darkness and the atmosphere seemed to stagnate round us, as we sate upon our watch. And steps came on—on—bounding upon the stairs like Jamie's happy footsteps—and voices rang below like Jamie's gay clear tones—and the stealthy air beside me whispered in my ear as certainly that this and this and this again was him. But it was not him—and still the night went on, and neither Jamie nor his wife returned.

At last the great figure opposite me erected itself in the darkness. Heaven knows what merciful influence struck the pursuer's heart, or what fatigue beneficently sent had come upon his frame.

"I can wait no longer," said Donald abruptly, "but the first thing the morn's morning I'll be here again."

I followed him to the door—if it had been hard to see him watching with me, it was harder still to watch him passing down the stair where I did not venture to follow, and where he might meet Jamie face to face. I stood and

listened breathlessly as step by step his heavy foot went echoing down. Now and then he paused to listen for some one ascending—but at last I heard him fairly reach the bottom of the stair, and pace along the passage. I stole down softly to see that he was gone—and he was. I returned up the stair with a lightened heart.

Ascending again, a faint sound of steps flying before me filled me with alarm and wonder, for I had passed no one on the stairs; but the passenger, whoever it was, disappeared, and I saw no trace when I reached the door I had left behind me open. I concluded it was Sybil's servant whose curiosity had been awakened too.

CHAPTER VIII.

I WENT back again into the dark room and took up my former place, once more to watch and listen. The night seemed full of mystery and suspicion, and the time of selfish abstraction out of which I thus abruptly awoke had placed barriers between me and all who had confided in me of old ; but I had only resumed my seat for a few minutes when the steps I was wont to hear at night, light and faint, passing by my chamber door, or stirring in the closet, began to come and go stealthily without—advancing to this apartment, as I thought, and then drawing back with strange timidity—

a faint light too came in under the door—some one was lingering without.

Everything increased my excitement, my fear and anxiety—yet I sat still waiting, and could not rise to ascertain who was there—at last after faint sounds like rustlings on the door, and touches essaying to open it, it was opened and Sybil came in with a light in her hand. Her cheek was blanched, white as marble, and her eyes sought me out in the darkness with a full gaze too eager to falter. She came up to me at once, setting down the light on the table as she passed—and Sybil laid her hand on my shoulder, and fixed her eyes on my face.

“What does he want?”

My lips were parched like her own. I said “Jamie,” with a gasp and could say no more.

She sat down before me on the seat from which Donald Clerk had risen. Her dress was light in colour, and fell down in long folds upon the floor, making a faint whiteness in the partial gloom—and in all her form there was a tremble as of one awakened looking for something to be

told—something to be done. The lids ceased to droop over her eyes, and were lifted full in questioning eagerness. Her hand moved and shook when it rested on her knee.

“What has he done? what has he done?” said Sybil; but every breath upon her features, every stir of her frame, said, “what can I do? what can I do?”

“He is suspected,” was my answer; “suspected of some breach of trust—I cannot tell what—and this man is on the watch for him, and will show no pity if Jamie has been guilty. Is he guilty? Do you know anything—or, at least, where is he, Sybil; and where have you been?”

“I have been wandering about the hill, thinking if anything could be done, or what I could do,” said Sybil; “where Jamie is I cannot tell, or how he spends these long, long dreary nights. Yes, I can guess how he spends them; but what he has done, or if he has done anything amiss in the warehouse I cannot tell. He comes home to me night after night, so as it

breaks my heart to see him—and I cannot tell where he gets the means, and I know he is careless of the business, and what can I do but suspect him? I dare not say Jamie is not guilty—I dare not say it—for I have feared and trembled till I scarcely could bear my life—but if he is, what can we do, Willie? what can we do—what will make amends?”

“Nothing but restitution,” said I, “and that Donald Clerk will take into his own hands. My father and Andrew—he has them to come upon—but Jamie, Jamie—what will become of him? for Donald will not be content to have his money simply restored.”

“You speak as if you were sure,” said Sybil, with some impatient tears, “and yet—and yet you are right, Willie. Shall I go and seek him, and take him away?—we might leave the country—we could do anything—will I go away and seek him now. I can carry the bairn in my shawl. I can be ready in a moment.”

And Sybil started to her feet with nervous haste—the tears upon her cheek seemed to dry

of themselves under the heat and flush which changed its marble paleness into burning crimson—and again the tremor of earnest resolution came upon her delicate frame, and the hand with which she put aside her hair shook with her very excess of readiness and concentrated power.

But my heart faltered at any rapid action, I drew her back and held up my hand.

“There is some one on the stair; hush! listen! It may be Jamie—and Jamie may be innocent. No, no, Sybil, we must wait to-night—we must wait through to-night.”

“It is not Jamie,” said Sybil; “Jamie’s step is never like that when he comes home now—and they aye stop at the other door—they never come here—they never come here! As if I had not watched and sickened at them till the morning light came to blind me. Everybody else gets light steps home at lawful times; but the foot aye stops below—it never comes here.”

And sitting down once more, Sybil put her

hand to her eyes and shed again a few passionate tears. But the time of weeping was not yet; anxiety, longing to bestir itself has no leisure for the offices of sorrow.

“Jamie is careless, thoughtless, full of faults,” said I; “he lets himself be led astray, he scarcely seems to try to resist temptation; but we have no reason to doubt his honour, or to think he would be led into crime. No, Sibby, no, he would never do that. He may sink awhile, and lose himself, and fall into dissipation—bad enough, oh, bad enough, heart-breaking for you and me—but he never could do this, Sibby—he never could do this to destroy us all.”

“I take the worst, and make up my mind to it,” said Sybil. “Some folk think their own are never wrong—never will believe evil of them. I would give my life this moment for Jamie, and be thankful to be taken in his stead; but I cannot shut my eyes; I can only believe what’s true, and none of us dare take this up and say it is impossible. Oh, if it were only

slander of him! if it were only anything false that was said!—but it's true—true—true."

"You do not know," exclaimed I, as Sybil's slight figure went and came before me, pacing the twilight room. "You do not know—and I dare not accuse Jamie, though I dare not pronounce him innocent. Wait—it is hard, but we must do it, Sibby—and when Jamie comes in, at whatever hour, if he is guilty we must hear it, once for all."

"If he is guilty, at whatever hour," said Sybil, standing firmly before me, "he must go away. I must go with him away—where, I do not care—anywhere—to the bottom of the sea—to the end of the earth—anywhere! but out of disgrace we must go away with our misery, Willie. Ay, we will carry our disgrace too, no fear: but we will carry it away our two selves, and among strangers, who never heard our name."

She sat down abruptly as she had risen, now no longer in the darkness, but close by the

lighted table—and Sybil drew her work to her, and took the needle in her trembling fingers. I changed my seat to be nearer her, and we sat in silence a long time, I listening eagerly still to every sound, she, with the tremor of her resolve strong upon her, plying her needle with strange silent haste, and seeming almost wilfully, with the constant rustle of her hand and work, to shut out from her ear those passing sounds to which she was no less nervously awake than I.

Resuming thus our more usual positions and employments brought a temporary relief to our excitement, and at last I found voice to ask how long it was since Jamie's relapse began.

Sybil lifted her head to look at me with grave concern. "Something happened to you—" she said.

"Yes," I answered steadily, "something happened to me. I lost mastery of myself as poor Jamie has done, and lost my hopes and the new life, Sibby, that gave me so many dreams. I have nothing but friends, brothers

and sisters, in this world now—I have no Mary. That was what happened to me.”

Sybil’s eyes dwelt upon me with tender compassion. She said nothing, but only looked at me with a great tear trembling under either eyelid.

“But tell me about Jamie,” said I.

With a slight start Sybil returned to her work. She seemed to have greater ease in speaking of him when absorbed with it.

“When we found you so—so changed, Willie,” said Sybil; “he was very anxious for a while, and would sit for hours speaking of you, and asking if I thought we could do anything to cheer you. Then he began to say you did not care, did not want us, and I thought so too, and was afraid to speak or meddle with your troubles; then you stayed long out, you avoided our company, you never seemed to heed what Jamie did or Jamie said, and that took away a check that had done him good. I thought it was all me, Willie—we are aye so vain. I thought, when I heard that Jamie had

been wild, and saw how steady he was all the spring, I thought it was for my sake ; but I have learned many a lesson since that night when you did not come home.


“After a while, Jamie seemed to be dull at night with nobody to speak to but me, and then he would go out to take a walk, and stayed first one hour and then two, and so on till it came to be far on in the night before he came home. Then Mrs. Cockburn’s son and some more like him began to come about the warehouse through the day ; and you never noticed nor paid any attention, however flighty Jamie was at tea-time, or silent and vexed at breakfast. I had nobody to speak to, Willie, not a single living creature, for it was not likely I could complain of Jamie to a stranger, nor grieve your mother with my story. I might have spoken to you, if you had been like yourself, but I had lost even that comfort. This week past I have been half desperate, and when Jamie went out at night I have gone out too,

and wandered round all the walks about the Craigs and Arthur's Seat, and far out into the country sometimes, trying to forget myself. I have spoken to him twice; the first time he promised he would never do it again, the second time he was angry, and would not hear me. Then I gave it up, and kept my misery to myself, and all the time I have had the terror of this—the terror of something like this—strong upon me, and half-distracted, that I could do nothing, neither to save nor make amends. Twice I've been out in the country at Donald Clerk's door, and turned back, feared to do more ill than good if I told him. To-night I went again, and would have spoken if I could have found him, for I thought anything was better than this misery; but when I was half-way up the stair, and stood back in the dark because I heard somebody coming down, I could have fainted when I saw it was Donald Clerk; and I was standing still, feared to move, when you ran down after him. Then I

hurried up before you. I am better now—I am stronger now I know what it is—and I am ready, Willie, if anything can be done.”

She went on with her work without a pause. The needle went smoothly as I thought, in spite of the strong tremor upon her—tremor, but not faltering; for Sybil was right—there was a degree of strength and readiness in her delicate frame which even she herself did not know—so long as anything could be done.

The night was passing on; already twelve o'clock drew near, and Sybil put away her work with a start, and left me alone. She had not watched for him to-night—she had rather shut her ear against all watching—but I thought she had gone to the closet window at last to repeat her dreary vigils. Not so; the servant had been sent to rest—the baby, carefully covered, and with its little head veiled from the faint light, slept peacefully in the wicker cradle. Sybil went and came between the kitchen and sitting-room, lighted a fire in the grate, spread



the table, and put refreshments on it as she might have done for travellers about to set out on a journey. Then she went to the plain wooden chest which stood in one corner, and sought out a little stock of linen, small garments for the sleeping baby, necessities for Jamie. While she went about all this she never spoke; but the swell of resolution in her person, the nostril unconsciously dilating, the nervous rapid movements, spoke with greater emphasis than words. She could bear the slow-paced time when she could give to it even such occupation as this, and terrible though the necessity was, and bitter the anticipated flight, yet it was something more tolerable, and less wretched, than the stretch of passive endurance to which no exertion was possible.

And swiftly, firmly, though with shaking fingers, she made up her bundle, rapidly laid in order her child's dress to be put on whenever it was necessary to wake it from its deep, sweet baby sleep; and laid upon a chair her own shawl and bonnet, and the overcoat which

Jamie had worn in winter. Strangely absorbed with her preparations, I looked on without speaking; and now sounds and footsteps had died away into silence, the deep hush of night had fallen from the roof to the basement, the streets were still, the lights were disappearing from neighbour windows. Again we were both seated, dismally looking from opposite sides of our bare half-lighted room towards each other; all needful preparations over, in a stillness and rest which made our hearts sick, listening for a footstep which never came.

Patience! patience! but bitter, sad, impossible it is, after a long vigil, to preserve unbroken this waiting calm. I saw the glowing flush gather upon Sybil's face—the fever light under her eyelids—myself was chafing with a frenzy of exhausted quiet. Moment upon moment, pulse on pulse; still as death and noiseless these minutes hung about us dallying with our pain. The baby breathed deeply and calmly into the unbroken air of this dim room;

the clocks without struck their silver tones upon the night; now and then a passing voice hollow and echoing, rang to us up the long vacant stair in dreary jest; and sounds of wheels, late carriages of revellers, faintly rumbled out of the silence, struck a dull noise out as they past, and echoed away again into the night like passing thunder. I sat still, gnawing my lip till I felt it bleed; but Sibby started up to walk from end to end of the long room—to return to all her arrangements—to overlook them once more with feverish eagerness to find something amiss which might be remedied. Then she tried to resume her work—but that was vain—and then she hurried from the room, and went and came for a time in restless impatience. The light fall of her foot—the faint rustle of her coming and going—brought upon me an irrepressible irritation, and I knew by the slight impatient start with which she turned to me, unconsciously upbraiding, when I myself moved on my chair,

or even broke the hush with a heavier sigh than usual, that the same feeling was strong on Sybil too.

But the night began—I felt it though it was too early to see—to yield to the faint early morning. A flicker of half-invisible dawn by-and-bye subdued into cold and watery gray the deep tint of the night skies. The stars began to pale into the firmament, sickening and withdrawing, one could not well tell how; and I cannot say with what a start of terror our eyes met, communicating to each other the certainty that daybreak was at hand.

What if he did not come home?—what if Jamie's guilt already was past doubt and past escape?—or what if he had fled without a word of intimation, without even a farewell?

But even then a hurried step began to ring upon the stair—up—higher up—and Sybil rose to meet it, bending forward with eager outstretched head, and hands lifted in involuntary beseeching. He had come home.

CHAPTER IX.

THE door was opened to him before he could knock, and with a light step Jamie came in. His face was something pale, wet with moisture and bearing traces of exhaustion—but exultation was the present mood of his brilliant eyes. Either the interest of to-night's proceedings, whatever they were, had neutralized all trifling temptations, or else his debauch had worn off, and left only fumes of exhilaration and excitement behind.

“I am very late, Sibby,” he said, hurriedly; “never mind, it shall not happen again—and to-night I could not avoid—. What, a supper for me? and Willie sitting up too.”

With a slight suspicion Jamie glanced at my face ; then he looked round the room—the bundle made up, the great coat ready, Sybil throwing over her arm the ready shawl. He looked aghast.

“ What does it all mean ? ” he asked, faltering with sudden dismay.

I would have spoken, but Sybil took the word.

“ Donald Clerk has been here to-night ; here a long time watching and lying in wait for you ; he is to come again to-morrow—he thinks you have done wrong—he suspects you, Jamie—and he is to come again to-morrow. Now lose no time—is it true ? for I am ready at once—everything is ready—and there may be time to escape.”

He turned away with a low groan, and covered his face with his hands. No one spoke—but Sybil clutched at the covering on her baby’s cradle, and drew her low chair to its side, grasping at the child’s dress as she threw down its little coverlet. With a pang, my own

heart yielded up its hope. Alas, poor Sibby! with all these preparations she had tried to cheat the expectation which still prophesied better things.

“Stop!” said Jamie, and turning to him again I found his face as bright as ever. “Stay, stay, it is a mistake. I have no need to run away. Sibby, stay. I am quite ready to meet Donald Clerk.”

She looked up to him holding the long muslin frock still in her hand.

“Is it not true, Jamie?”

“Is what not true? I will have to sit up to-night, and set my books a little—but I’m quite prepared, Sibby, to meet Donald Clerk—what’s the use of looking suspicious? Willie, I tell you I’m all right. I have the money safe in my pocket, and don’t need to fear any man in the world.”

Sibby looked up with dreary interest in his face. What did he mean? Nothing, alas nothing to satisfy her! but I interfered—it was now time for me.

"Sit down, Jamie; come, we have had an anxious night—you must tell us the whole story now."

"The whole story is simple enough," said Jamie, with a little defiance; "you would be none the wiser, Sibby; and what would Willie care. It is a month now since he has either looked or spoken to one of us; what's the use of coming in now, and pretending to have an interest. I tell you I have got the money in my pocket, and everything is right; an hour at my books, and I'm ready to meet a hundred Donald Clerks."

"I have had no say with you, and given you no advice for some time," said I. "You may take it from me now with better grace. Go to bed, Jamie, and sleep yourself fit for your books, or hand them over to me. Sibby, there is no time to say more; I know what an hour at his books means—it means that they are in considerable disorder and will take several hours. Let us ask no more questions to-night. And, Jamie, take some rest—take supper if you

are able—no one will disturb you ; but get to sleep at once, and be ready when this man comes.”

“I’ll begin at once,” said Jamie, hurriedly. “I can sleep after the work is done, since you are all so much afraid.”

“Donald vows he will know neither charity nor mercy,” said I ; “and look at your hand—is that fit to begin to your books ? Sit down, man, lie down—there is no time to waste.”

Jamie wavered a moment—then he crossed the room to where Sibby stood passive, quiet, holding in her hand the baby’s coverlet—not knowing apparently whether to lay it over the little sleeper again, or to snatch the infant up, and hurry on its dress in readiness for the wild journey still.

“I will be careful again, Sibby,” said Jamie’s deprecating voice. “I have been very imprudent this time. Tom Cockburn, you see—but I’ll tell you the whole story to-morrow—and I’ve kept you late up, too, and vexed you. We’ll do different now, Sibby, and everything

is right and I'm all restored again, and have nothing to fear from Donald Clerk. I'll lie down here on the settee and take a sleep, and Willie will call me in an hour or so. Willie was always a grand man for wakening; and you'll go away like a good lassie and take your rest. Now you're not to be feared, Sibby—I'll tell you the whole story, and we'll all be right again to-morrow."

Tears began to fall noiselessly down Sybil's cheeks, but she saw what was necessary, and restrained herself. Jamie lay down on the sofa, and she covered him with careful tenderness. He would not suffer her to sit by him as she wished, and the baby waking up threatened a failure to Jamie's sleep. So Sybil was prevailed on to carry the little wailer away to her own room, and take herself the rest which she needed; while I, who had slept in dull heaviness through many an hour when Sybil kept vigil, sat by Jamie's side and watched, lest his slumber should exceed the proper time.

And softly, as on a child, sleep fell on Jamie;

he laid his head upon his hand, and his cheek flushed with the pressure. Many a time before had I looked at him in this child's attitude, in the dreamless uninterrupted slumber of a boy. He was a boy still, in spite of all his experiences—and I thought sadly of our little deserted room at Ailieford; of the light lying on the vacant pillows where our heads had reposed side by side; of all the little familiar tokens of our joint tenancy, which had never been removed from "the laddies room." Ay, and how the morning sky would brighten upon those hostages of Mary, those tokens sad and bitter of the home I had once hoped to rear, and how my father and my mother calm in their unconscious slumber, knew nothing of the miseries which had past upon their children—nothing of this terrible night—nothing of the disgrace and ruin which had hovered over their humble home for so many hours of fear. Ruin, downfall, disgrace; and who could say if the dark wings were in truth folded and at rest, or if they shadowed us still.

Such a morning as the glorious one which now began to flush the earth and sky, I have seen break on many an hour of special trial. As it brightened, I felt it was time to relinquish my vigil, and call Jamie to his work. It was now full daylight, bright and glowing, and with some grumbling and reluctance he got up, and collected himself slowly. "Ay, I mind—I got the money from Tom Cockburn last night," said Jamie, drowsily, "it's here in my pocket-book in my breast pocket; and now for the books."

Jamie got up, unlocked a small iron chest, which always stood in a corner of the room, and took from it his cash-box—a bundle of notes was transferred from the pocket-book to this safer repository, and then he sat down, perfectly self-possessed and competent, to his books. Seeing him so, and unwilling to disturb him, I retired to my own room; and there lay awake with little breaks of dozing sleep to tantalize my weariness for two other sunshiny hours. By that time, the daily household stir

had commenced. Sybil's servant had been singing loudly as she swept out the warehouse ; and Jamie's task was completed, and breakfast on the table when I left my room.

Jamie himself entered after me—he had been arranging his dress, and though I could still see traces of exhaustion on his face, there was nothing to attract the notice of a stranger, or tell of watching, or agitation uncommon or severe. Sybil, too, in nothing except unusual paleness, and unusual composure, betrayed her past suffering ; but our breakfast table was a very silent one as we gathered round it.

And Sybil's eyes made painful journeys from Jamie to me, from me to Jamie ; and Jamie cast down his, not to encounter the inquiry which had not yet been spoken. At last he himself broke the silence abruptly.

“ I'll tell you how it was. Tom Cockburn's wife has begun a shop—a strange kind of shop—a sort of silversmith's—they say she has a brother in that trade ; and after they begun, they were greatly stressed for money ; and a

fortnight since, Tom came to me and told me—for we had been great cronies, and—and—I got a favour once from Tom myself. He told me they were in great straits, and in fear of having their stock seized, and fifty pounds would set them all right, and they were sure of as much as that in a week. Well, it just happened that a man had paid a bill that day of sixty pounds, and *it* was to pay two other bills that came due in seven days. I mean only accounts, you know, Willie—payments—not regular bills that might be dishonoured; so I was persuaded—for it's better to tell you the whole, I owed him some little thing myself, and he threatened me—to give the money to Tom Cockburn. At the end of the week he was not ready, and I've been at him every night this week, as Sibby knows—I mean Sibby knows how late I was—dunning him for this weary siller; and at last I've got it all safe and everything's right. Now haste you, Sibby, with the tea. I'll run out and make the two payments, and there will be no harm done."

“ But Donald Clerk will be here immedately,” said I.

“ Oh, I’ll slip out by the back way—nobody will ever see me—and be in in no time; and besides, when the money’s all right I’m not caring for a lecture. But, man, Willie, I *was* feared at Sibby speaking about escape last night. It was like as if I had stolen the money from Donald Clerk.”

“ And if Donald Clerk had come yesterday instead of to-day, nothing could have cleared you, Jamie,” said I. “ You could have made no defence—you would have met no pity—a dreadful risk to run for Tom Cockburn !”

There was positive sunshine on Sybil’s face—such a glow of contrast from the cloud it wore half-an-hour ago, that I scarcely had the heart to discourage her again. She interrupted me eagerly.

“ It might not be wise—it might be very much the reverse—imprudent and wrong too in a degree; but it was innocent, Willie. A very

different thing from that fearful word you said last night—crime !”

“But, Jamie, Jamie,” I exclaimed, “remember if you had been twenty-four hours later, all the world would have thought it crime—your good name lost, your family ruined, yourself—it is frightful to think of it—where you might have been by this time, and in what circumstances, had Tom Cockburn been a day later, or the news come a day earlier to Donald Clerk—perhaps flying a dishonoured fugitive—perhaps a prisoner still more dishonoured. Jamie, see what a risk you have run, and for pity’s sake beware again.”

“So I will,” said Jamie, laughing, as he rose from the table, “I don’t deny I’ve been very much scared, but never so much as last night, when I saw Sibby’s bundle, and her shawl ready, and her white, prepared face. It gave me a glimpse of the reality, Willie; I never can forget it, and we’ll mind to do nothing of the kind again.”

I followed him as he hurried down stairs.

“Are you out of Tom Cockburn’s power?” I asked hurriedly, as I pressed after him; “Jamie—tell me; has he a hold upon you yet?”

Jamie’s face flushed, and he faltered a little.

“I owe him something yet,” he said, with hesitation.

“How much?—tell me; we must try to pay it, Jamie. He will ruin you yet, if you leave him any power,” exclaimed I. “How much do you owe him?”

“Willie, let me pass—I have no time,” and Jamie pushed away from me impatiently. When he had freed himself, he looked back. “I must go now—I must get my business done,” he cried, half in apology; and Jamie was gone.

It was nearly my own time for business, and I crossed the street and breathed myself with a hurried walk to the Calton Hill, and a brief “turn” upon its breezy top. This was not a breezy day, though the air was brisker here than on the calm surface of country laying below, on which the sunshine, early as it was,

began to settle down in almost oppressive quiet and brightness. One of the drowsy, still, hot days of early autumn, the morning freshness was already stealing away from the atmosphere so heavily laden with sunshine, and your very breath was checked by the broad flush of glowing light which penetrated everywhere. The morning was feverish in its brightness, but my own fever had relaxed, my veins were cool, my heart restored to comparative sanity. I was no longer a wandering solitary, lost to my race, my kindred, and the world. Light, but firm, the bond of conscious duty, of natural affection, of life with all its manifold offices lay on me once again. I had not, after all, been severed by one violent wrench from everything dear and kindly. The tempest muttered away in the distance, the thunder rolled no longer over my very head, but my foot was still upon the same soil, my face turned to the same skies. I had been mad, but madness was not destruction—struck to the heart, but with no death-blow. Ease and lightness of heart were far from me—perhaps as far from my

present standing-ground as the calm and cool of twilight were from this burning day ; but further still, as I felt, and knew, were destruction and despair. Sore and unhealed was still my wound, but it was a wound known and ascertained, and penetrated my whole being no more. I might be sad, oppressed, and weary ; but I was myself, and myself was unchanged.

I felt it as I went about my daily business, felt it in the glow of renewal which came upon everything round me, in restored interest, restored feeling, and even in the conscious pain which lay motionless at the bottom of my heart. Life had come back to me, though I desired it not ; life, it might be, deprived of the glowing mists of a young man's fancy, but great as it never is till you have looked upon it through the medium of your own tears. For, mark you, another's tears will not do ; the great Creator diversifies the form of His handiwork so, that processes, broad and universal, will not do for men—and the time of my especial ordeal had come to me and passed.

CHAPTER X.

AT our little tea-table that evening, Jamie was jubilant and elated; Sibby quieter, but overflowing with thankfulness and good pleasure. I thought of Seller and Spender, my old kind masters, as I shook my head with monitory wisdom over Jamie's joy. Wild, thoughtless exhilaration, just such as theirs used to be, was this outburst which hailed Jamie's deliverance from his first peril; and it did not seem to strike him that it might be well and expedient to think of the cause, and feel less innocently exultant over the redemption which he certainly had not deserved. But it was useless

saying so much to Jamie, and saying would have done but little good.

"It's all over, Willie," he cried, gleefully, "Donald Clerk did not come till I was safely settled in my den again, with my receipts locked up in my desk—and I got them dated two or three days back—nobody was the worse of that."

"You were, yourself, for you knew it to be untrue," ventured I.

"Man, you need not be always preaching! Well, Donald came, and Donald was a little put out, I can tell you, and ashamed of himself, when he saw me canny at my desk and everything in good order. I pretended I was very indignant, and asked him how he could really suspect me? and Donald shook his head, and said: 'You ken yourself you're a graceless vagabone,' but was ashamed for all that. So we parted the best friends in the world. And all the advice he gave me, when he went away, was to mind if I did ill for him I did ill for myself, and that my own good was involved in

everything that concerned the business, even more than his. ‘Your gentleman brother told me last night that I might lose my miserable siller, but you would lose life and everything that made it worth,’ said Donald; ‘a braw lad he is, no doubt, to scoff at my belongings, that will never have two sixpences of his ain; but, nevertheless, laddie, mind you, it’s true.’ And I confess, Donald glanced like a wild cat or a tiger, as he said that; but then we shook hands as kindly as could be, and he went away.”

“Ay, Jamie, mind it’s true,” said I earnestly, “if it would be a sin to harm Donald Clerk, what would it be to harm Sibby there, and bring ruin to her door—not to speak of yourself, a young man with all your life to come.”

“Well, Willie, be content; there is no fear,” said Jamie, gaily; “I’ve got one good fright, and I’ll never throw myself in the way of another. It’s all past now—we have some more experience, Sibby and I—and burnt bairns

dread the fire, my mother says—we'll never do the like again."

By-and-bye, when the baby had been hushed to its early sleep, I found that in seal of their full reconciliation Jamie and his wife were going out together; and I seized the opportunity of Sibby's absence, preparing for the walk, to press again upon my brother the subject of his debt to Tom Cockburn. It was a very unpalatable subject to Jamie—he writhed about on his chair, shrugged his shoulders, made faces, but could not quite elude me.

"It's bigger than I like to mention to Sibby," said Jamie, with some embarrassment, "and it's all very true you say, Willie, and I had far better be clear, and all that; but you see Tom's not a bad fellow—I can manage him very well, and he'll never press me—and then we're old cronies, and know each other so well—and I did him one good turn—he owes me another. Oh, there's no fear of Tom! I'll pay him by-and-bye."

"By-and-bye is a deceiver, Jamie," urged

I. "I'll give you all I can spare next quarter if you'll make a trial to pay him. No, Tom Cockburn had not much ill in himself, except being fond of company—but what sort of person is his wife?"

"His wife? oh! she's just Tom Cockburn's wife," said Jamie, hurriedly, "nothing more that I know of."

"Would you like to see Sibby with her?" continued I, pursuing my advantage.

"Sibby with *her*?" Jamie's face grew suddenly red, and standing up, he pushed away his chair with positive violence. "I'll tell you what—I could find it in my heart very near to murder the woman if she came near our Sibby."

"Yet you say there's no fear of Tom!" said I. "Poor Tom! and you can trust yourself in the hands of a man who has so settled his own fate? Jamie, Jamie, beware."

"Well, I know no ill of her," said Jamie, faltering, "and I dare say she's a very good wife to him. I've nothing to do with the kind

of woman Tom Cockburn chooses. She's just his wife, and I know nothing more about her ; but Sibby, Willie, poor Sibby ! who is like *her* ?”

“ And Sibby's husband has little excuse for seeking such company as she could not join him in,” continued I. “ Jamie, let us try to make it up between us—you shall have everything that I can spare—and get Tom Cockburn paid.”


“ But you, Willie,” and Jamie looked at me wistfully.

“ I am Mr. Middleton's clerk,” said I, “ not the Moulisburgh Dominie—and for anything I know—I could almost say for anything I care—may be Mr. Middleton's clerk all my life.”

Jamie did not venture to say anything sympathetic—he only repeated his wistful look, as if he would fain have given me comfort. But Sibby entered then ready for her walk ; and I did feel somewhat solitary and dreary as I watched them go away.

While they were absent, I spent a rather

melancholy hour arranging my books. My poor Ainsworth—of whom any one was welcome to make a footstool now—and all the useless tools which were no longer needful for my thwarted purpose—I spread them on the table before me, and sat down to ponder over them. For one moment, in a little flush of angry pride, I opened my Virgil, and laid the dictionary ready—with some faint thought of carrying out my plan, and showing myself capable of success. But my hands fell down upon the opened page, my brow stooped between them—and then came upon me, with long sighs and weariness, many a sad remembrance of Mary. Mary—Mary—I forgave her the wrong she did me, and forgot it; but it was hard to unclasp the tenacious clinging love which had held my heart so long. The bitter, harsh, resentful thoughts died of their own fever—the tenderness came back again—back and back like the ebbing waves upon the sand, so that I sometimes thought the tide was coming in instead of flowing out upon the sea.



Another day of quiet routine—as I saw of most grateful calm to Sybil, and still of innocent exultation and light-heartedness to Jamie—brought the Saturday night, and with it my journey home. More weary than usual seemed the long quiet road, rich, as it was, with parting sunshine, with evening skies flushed and beautiful, stooping above it, and heavy green foliage bursting over every garden wall. The roads were lively with family groups, and the surf rustling up upon the beach, carried back pleasant sounds of summer—sweet rings of laughter, and joyous voices—to float with lingering echo into the calmer air upon the sea—and even the dusty highway had here and there a little throng of wayfarers coming and going to diversify its level line. But my heart wearied, and so did my footsteps—I was going home—going home—and home was never dearer to any son of womankind than it was to me ; but a dull and heavy content, a sad submission to the inevitable, hung upon me like a cloud—and something whispered that life would never open

to me another home than this—that all my youthful hopes and fancies must be content to settle down upon this calm familiar ground. My father's son—my mother's son—brother to my brother—but nothing more—nothing more—and as I went forward into the twilight with my slow step, and sober brow, I seemed to myself to be travelling steadily into my sober fate.

Andrew was lingering near his shop-door when I passed, looking for me as I perceived at once—for Andrew was not a man to waste in lounging the precious hours of a Saturday night. As I came up he clutched me by the arm, and turned along the road with me—and very visible discontent and anxiety were on Andrew's face.

“What's this about Jamie?” he asked abruptly.

“What about Jamie?” was my counter question; for I was very reluctant to make Jamie's secret known.

“Tut—you had best not trifle with me,”

said Andrew, angrily. "I have seen Donald Clerk, and heard a long story from him of distrust and suspicion on his part, and wild dissipation on Jamie's; what's wrong—Donald was in a fever—but I thought it better to ask nothing, thinking I would hear soon enough if it were true. Speak plain—I'm not a man for nonsense—what is it, Willie?"

"There's nothing amiss," said I, "Donald Clerk has seen Jamie's books, and been perfectly satisfied. Everything is quite right between them."

"Was anything wrong between them?" said Andrew, "do you know I'm responsible for Jamie the length of two hundred and fifty pounds. It's all very well for you, who have nothing to lose—but to be brought in for that would ruin me—a young man new set up in business and coming in to a family—I wonder you can be so thoughtless, Willie; I wonder Jamie can look honest folk in the face."


"I tell you there's nothing amiss," said I, with some impatience. "Jamie may look any-

body in the face—and if Donald Clerk is distrustful that is no fault of Jamie's. He has been unsteady this week or two, I am very sorry—but you need not mention that, Andrew, to grieve my mother—and I think it's over now."

"Oh, I mentioned the whole thing to my mother when she was in this morning," said Andrew, with a slight snort like a restive horse, "and I could hardly keep her from starting off to Edinburgh at once, or waiting on the road till you came. You can tell her any kind of a story you like, but she knows all that I know."

"Very well! she shall know all that I know too," I answered, hurriedly. "I see that poor Jamie had your good word and charitable thought, at least—but you might have spared my mother."

"Nonsense!" said Andrew, impatiently; "my mother has just as good a right to hear as any other person—not to say that she had her full share in spoiling him, and ought to know what comes of it. I'll tell you what, Willie—though



I *am* his brother, I have a great mind to withdraw, and be his surety no more."

"You must do as you think best," said I ; "it is yourself alone that can be the judge, and not me ; if you withdraw we'll try to get somebody else ; and if we don't get somebody else, Jamie will lose his situation—and that will mend the matter certainly ; but you must take your own will. I don't pretend to be able to advise you, Andrew."

"Unsteady ! what business has he to be unsteady ?" continued Andrew, heating himself into a little passion ; "*I* cannot afford to spend a sixpence on my own pleasure. He'll waste pounds, I'll answer for it ; and a young showy wife, and a servant, to keep her like a lady—but *I'm* to be responsible for Jamie's intromissions, and have a continual danger hanging over my head for him—a pretty story ! and, of course, both my mother and you, through thick and thin, will take Jamie's part."

"I should be as anxious as you if I saw any danger of Jamie bringing loss upon you," said

I, "and as earnest to prevent it; but he has got a lesson—I believe he will be careful now—and I promise you to watch and do everything I can to keep him right. He has been very careless—he has scarcely come to man's estate yet, Andrew; but Jamie is greatly startled and sobered by this—I mean," I added hurriedly, seeing that I had almost betrayed him, "sobered and startled into greater care when he felt himself going too far."

"As if he had any right to go too far," muttered Andrew, angrily, "as if any man had a right to risk other people for the sake of his own folly! If he will ruin himself let him do it in his own way, but I am not to stand by, and look on while he ruins me."

I made no answer—there was not much answer possible, to tell the truth—and I did not feel quite convinced that I was right in concealing the full facts from Andrew, greatly as they concerned him; but I consoled myself with the thought that after evil might be averted, whereas Andrew's alarm, if I told him now, would

take immediate steps to prevent the possibility of danger to himself.

"It is Saturday night—I must go back to the shop," said Andrew. "Tell Jamie from me, that after all that's come and gone, such folly as I have heard of can have no excuse. He has a family to maintain, a wife and child as well as me, and he has a good situation if he only have wit enough to keep it, besides other folk involved and bound for him—which he ought to consider first of all. Tell him I'll take no steps now, because I would not like that he should lose a chance through me if it's possible to help it; but if I hear anything again I must look after my own interests. It's all very well for you, Willie, but I must see to myself."

"Yes," said I, with an involuntary sigh, "and I have no interests of my own to look after, Andrew, nothing to see to. You are very right."

Andrew had turned round when we stopped, and was holding out his hand to me to

say good night ; but he paused when I spoke, and lingered, holding loosely my extended hand, and looking with a shade of awakened interest in my face.

“Ay, Willie,” he said more kindly, “what about yourself? I have not heard for three or four weeks now, and Christina was asking me this very day. How is the Latin coming on? and when do you begin your new business?”

“I think never,” said I abruptly. “I have changed my mind.”

Andrew let my hand fall; a sarcastic smile came upon his face. “Well, I never approved of it much,” he said, with some very visible scorn, “but I *would* have given the thing a trial, if I had been you, after making up my mind. You have lost all your labour then, I suppose; you’re a rich man, Willie, that can afford to throw so much time away. If I had gone so far on the road, it would have been strange if I did not try to see an end to it; you should know your own mind best; but I suppose you’ve lost both money and money’s

worth now that you turn back and change your plans again."

"Yes," said I, "money's worth, and things worth more than money I have lost, and changed my plans again, Andrew, as you say."

"What is it to be now?" said Andrew, "slow men like me, that take long to think of one thing, are not so clever at changing. What is it now?"

"Nothing," said I, "I have no plans now. I suppose Mr. Middleton's office, and just such fortune as Providence may send me there. I'll learn to be content, and not try plans again."

"Till the next time," said my prudent brother; and as he bade me good-night once more, and turned away, I heard him mutter something to himself, and shake his head, half regretful, half complacent. I caught the words "unstable as water," as I went upon my own way. Ay, was it so; and as I went on into the grey, descending twilight, and left behind me the gold and purple of the setting sun, the climax of Andrew's quotation came whispering after

me, stealing into my ears like the mockery of some attendant spirit, "thou shalt not excel!" Dusk and dimness, shadows and solitude, lay before me on the silent road; into the heart of them I went steadily forward, lonely but not dismayed—for the spirit strangely subdued and hushed within me, seemed scarcely to have life enough for stout rebellion against this sentence of my fate.

CHAPTER XI.

HALF-WAY between Molisburgh and Ailieford, I met my mother—unable to wait for my arrival, in her anxiety for Jamie, she had come to meet me; and, indeed, I had already wondered how she could bear a day's suspense, and did not press on to Edinburgh at once, on hearing the news. But my father happened to have a little illness, and Marget a considerable one; they were both dependent on my mother, and only now had she been able to free herself. "I felt that I bid to speak to you first, our two selves, Willie," said my mother, "for there might be things you could not say before other

folk. And what is it now—what has my poor laddie done?”

“Nothing,” said I, “nothing; at least nothing but a great imprudence, which is remedied now and over; but, mother, you must help me to warn Jamie—he must be warned. This might have been very serious. Just the merest chance that he is not a fugitive, or in Donald Clerk’s power to-night.”

“What was it then, Willie?” My mother had grown quite pale.

I told her, interrupted by many an exclamation, the story of Jamie’s danger, of our vigil, and how very close his injured master was in pursuit. My mother was stunned at the moment, for this was a reality which even her fears had scarcely anticipated.

“I said there was aye water where the ox was drowned,” said my mother, “and I might, may be, think he had spent a pound or two more than his ain, and would have that to make up; but the like of this, I never thought of, Willie. It was not for himself—there is a

kind of comfort in that; but, preserve me, what's to come of Jamie, when there's naeboddy but that poor lassie to keep him right?"

"Do you mean when I leave Edinburgh, mother?" asked I.

"Ay, Willie, my man—you're just as precious to me as Jamie is, and your fortune is no to be hindered for him. Lord help us! what's to become of them!"

"After such a warning, mother?" I began.

But my mother shook her head. "What has happened once may happen again. Oh, Willie, Willie, do you think I dinna ken how little use there is in warnings—and a young laddie, and a wife, and a bairn to make provision for, and our whole family in his power for-by and answerable? Pity me!"

"If I can do Jamie any good, you need not fear, mother," said I, "for I've changed my mind. I shall not leave Edinburgh."

My mother started, stopped, looked earnestly, but with a half-reproof, in my face. "Your

brother is a near friend," she said, "but Mary—Mary has the first claim."

And I thought I could trace the lines of Andrew's judgment—"unstable as water"—in my mother's face.

I put Mary's letter into her hand, and turned away my head with a pang. I had never read it again myself, nor breathed a word of it to mortal ear, and my heart was sore—sore, wounded, bleeding—not fierce or revengeful any more, but penetrated with deep, still pain, very hard to bear.

My mother read the letter, and my mother's eyes glittered with tears angry and injured. I thought it better not to hear what she exclaimed half-aloud, her sympathetic feeling for me, scarcely sufficing to restrain the bitterness of her indignation towards Mary. Walking on with an averted head, shutting my ears to the half-articulate upbraidings which fell from her lips unawares, and walking along the very road where Mary had so often accompanied me, at the hour of evening quiet so dear to young

moved hearts, it was not singular that strange emotions should come upon myself. Tears stole into my eyes one by one—tears startled me, gliding over my cheek. Ashamed of the weeping which disparaged my manhood, I could not subdue it; and it was all I could do to keep the quiet air unconscious of the trembling sob which swelled up within my breast.

I left home on Monday morning, charged with messages, with warnings, with entreaties; and my mother had so often repeated "Tell Jamie," that I began to fear Jamie's patience would give way long before the store was ended. I did tell Jamie; but Jamie had begun to be half-resentful, and did not see why everybody should doubt his word, or think his resolution insincere. Then came my quarter-day, and I hurried with the five-pound note, which it was some self-denial for me to spare, and placed it in my brother's hand. He was a good deal moved, turned it over in his fingers, hesitated, thought it would

be better to let Tom Cockburn stand; but at last put it up, engaging to see his creditor at night, and pay him so far as that would go.

That night Sibby had to sit up again; and in deference to her own desire, I yielded, and suffered her to keep her watch alone. Next morning, Jamie was somewhat saucy. I thought he might fear another exertion of my Mentorship, and was making a little exhibition of defiance to forestal me; but I said nothing, for my own spirit just then was too dull and languid to be readily roused even into offence.

And so we went on for a time, our quiet broken by repeated extravagances on Jamie's part, our household order very much interrupted, yet day by day coming with its usual routine to us all. I do not know how it happened that I relinquished Mary so easily. I fancy my first frenzy had worn me out, and with its horror, diverted my thoughts from her to fix them on myself; but now that my heart, reacting, began to yearn and long for

her again, to dwell with saddening tenderness upon her memory, to recall her very name like a charm, I began to feel it strange, harsh, unnatural, that I had let our long engagement go without an effort to retain it; and sometimes I half-pleased myself with the imagination that she, forlorn as I was, might be repenting—longing once again for me; and roused by these thoughts, would hold impassioned conversations, and write long letters to her in my heart. But restraint was on me—a strange controlling impossibility kept me silent. I was aware of the very strong and sensible curb, and that it was no will of mine which bound me; but I could not break the barrier through.

And silently the sunny days of September went and came—they are all overcast and clouded to me now by remembrance of what followed. At the time, I fancy they had their common pleasures—their every-day lightening and enlivenment—and that we even jested and were merry in them now and then.

One of these nights, going home after a prolonged ramble, I encountered Donald Clerk prowling past the warehouse like a stealthy tiger, and examining its shuttered windows and the heavy bolts upon the cellar-door with the eye of a housebreaker. True, it was regard for his own property, and not evil designs upon another's, which gave him, for a moment, this look of secret villainous scrutiny; but I was almost inclined to think the feeling was the same.

"Ye may let him ken I keep an eye on him," said Donald Clerk, "though ye may well say he's no worth my trouble. This brother of yours has cost me more pains and looking after than ever man did in this world—if it werena once a ne'er do well of our ain—and what reason should I have, think you, no to cast the young fool off at once, and burden my hands with him no more?"

I shook my head. It was, indeed, quite inexplicable to me, how a man like this

should live in a continual fever of suspicion, when the power of dismissing poor Jamie summarily was so much in his power.

"He's out the now," continued Donald, "and just as like as no may be out till all the hours of the night. Never you think you have it all to yoursel, Mr. Gentleman. He's lost me twa three night's sleep, as well as other folk; but I'll take no such pains for him this time. You may say though, if you like, that I'm no sleeping for a' that my e'en may be shut—that I ken some folks' haunts and some folks' cronies as well as they ken themselves; and whenever I've an inkling of suspicion again—though I may say I'm never fairly without it—but whenever I see good cause to suspect jukery-pawkery again, I'll put no lee in my pocket as I did last time—and mark you, Willie Mitchell, if there should be flight or escape, I'll track him to the death."

"Discharge him—disgrace him—do anything in your power," exclaimed I, in breathless

excitement, "only for pity's sake give up this tremendous persecution, this pitiless watch; it is enough to drive a man mad."

"I tell you that you may warn him," said Donald Clark, "that he may see what the consequences will be, if he pursues his ill courses, and wrongs me in my business. For that reason, I tell you, I have an eye on him, that he may be warned, and draw back in time. If he's no warned—if he will rush on destruction, like a madman as he is, then the responsibility's off me; and pity or mercy, as I have told you before, he has none to expect from me."

"And yet you used to like Jamie," said I. I was positively scared with the aspect of the man.

"Wha gave you wit of that, or wha said my mind was changed?" exclaimed Donald. "Hear you, laddie. I'm a man that does not alter. What I did once, I do now—I do into the depths of whatever extremity I may be led to. Ye may mind that, and comprehend it

if you can. If it's aboon your fit, as I trow it well may be, let it alone: but whether your understanding's competent or no, the thing's true, and you may trust to what I say. Now gang hame, and watch for him coming, and see you let him ken, and take warning by what I've said."

And Donald strode away, with his cruel, lurid eyes. Jamie had done him greater harm already, than if he had wasted all his substance a hundred-fold.

I said nothing to Sybil when I went in. She was sitting in dreary patience, working. No words at all passed between us; I went to the window, as was my wont. It had not begun to darken yet, and it was scarcely time to expect Jamie home.

When it was twilight, he came in; and I took the earliest opportunity of Sybil's absence to deliver my charge.

"Watching—what is he watching for?" said Jamie, with a blanching cheek; "there's some-

thing uncanny about that man. What has he got in his head now?"

"It is a miserable scrutiny to have upon you constantly," said I. "Jamie, I wish you would take my advice; not that it is wise, but very rash and a great venture—but still it would deliver you from this."

"What is it? I would do anything," said Jamie, eagerly.

"Give up your situation—try again; my mother will take home Sibby to Ailieford, and you and I can manage together till you get another place. I see no other chance for you, Jamie; it is impossible you can succeed here."

Paler and paler grew Jamie's face; and my heart was pained at the long sighs that came from his strained breast.

"I cannot, Willie," he answered me; and his voice had sunk very low—under a whisper; "I cannot, I cannot—do not bid me, it is impossible."

"You may get a better, at least, you may

get as good," urged I. "Jamie, I am certain it would be better for yourself. It might put us about for a time, but we would soon get over that. I think you might venture ; and then the peace, the comfort to us all."

"I cannot, Willie," repeated my brother, "I cannot—it is impossible."

"This persecution of itself is enough to madden one into something desperate," said I. "I begin myself to feel as if everything I did were watched and noted. Better let us have poverty—want—a hundred times over. He cannot harm your character, Jamie—he dare not accuse you of anything. Leave him, leave him, nothing could be worse than this."

But all the time I spoke, these words, "I cannot, I cannot," flowed a perpetual chorus from the pale lips of Jamie. "Let us say no more about it," he added, when I was done ; "once for all, Willie, it is impossible. I would be glad, very glad, rejoiced, to do it now ; but it is not in my power, and if it ever will be, God knows."

He rose and went away with a dreary, hopeless look, sad to see. I followed him anxiously.

"Jamie, I am your brother, I have nothing but your interest at heart. Can you not trust your difficulty to me? will you not tell me what is wrong?"

Jamie faltered, "Oh, there is nothing wrong; I wish, Willie," he added, with some impatience, "I do just wish you would be content, and not persecute a man. I have plenty to vex me without you; and I tell you simply that I cannot do it, that is all. I am speaking of no difficulty—and I would be glad if one and another would only let me alone."

I said no more, but returned to my seat; and by-and-bye, with little comfort or feelings of repose among the household of us, we parted for the night.

Next evening Sybil came to me, with an alarmed face, to point out, from the window of the closet, Donald Clerk, prowling once more, with his tiger-look, about the warehouse

door. Not pausing long enough to attract attention, it was clear to us that his watch remained in full force—that his vigilance never slackened. I looked down upon him from the high window with a certain dread and awe. He seemed to me like a pursuing fate.

“Can he be suspicious again?” said Sybil, looking with dreary inquiry into my eyes. “Can he have cause to be suspicious again? I tremble before that man, Willie; why does he pursue Jamie so—why does he not far rather dismiss him at once? I would rather beg—I would rather starve. What does it mean?”

But I only shook my head; and Sibby sat down by her baby’s cradle, and cried silently. Neither lofty patience nor all-suffering love could bear that unvarying pressure, and now and then the strained heart gave way.

And I never heard that Tom Cockburn had been paid; at the same time, however, I heard nothing to the contrary, and I was content to

believe the best. But we were not always in this state of excited apprehension and pain; quite the reverse, indeed—for many quiet days and nights, when Donald Clerk was invisible, when the spectre, Tom Cockburn, did not cross our horizon; when Jamie was “steady,” and at home—came to relieve our sadder hours, and make us forget the constant wakeful suspiciousness which set sentinels around us, and kept us continually under the dread of this fiery tiger eye.

CHAPTER XII.

FEW things are so contagious, and few have so baneful an influence upon both entertainer and object—as suspicion. For myself, I know, in my most hopeful moments, it was enough that a remembrance of Donald Clerk's fixed look and lurid eye should shoot across my mind to make my heart faint within me, and though I saw no cause to conclude him correct in his apprehensions, they overpowered all my own judgment in a paralysis of fear. And I saw that Jamie's eye began to grow stealthy and furtive, that he threw long side looks of investigation along the street, and listened with a start and flush to voices on the stair. The

pure white brow of Sybil contracted into an almost habitual curve, and painful lines began to fix themselves about her delicate mouth. I never ceased urging Jamie to relinquish the situation which brought us all so much pain, and sometimes Sybil and myself simultaneously fell into a little outburst of indignation—I denouncing the insulting surveillance of Jamie's employer—Sybil clenching her small hand upon the table, and weeping hot and angry tears. But still Jamie himself said, "I cannot, I cannot," and it was in vain that his young wife implored him rather to encounter any degree of poverty, than to submit to this constant humiliation. I could not tell why it was he stood so firm in this particular, but firm and unyielding as a rock he did stand. "Wait a little, just wait, and everything will be well," said Jamie. My life was almost as much at this present time involved in his as Sibby's was, and I saw little reason to hope that everything would be well.

So from day to day vague anticipations of

some catastrophe attended me like ghosts. It was with a tremor that I mounted the stair at night, with an indefinite awe that I awoke upon every morning, with a sigh of deep relief that I thanked God for another day safely gone into the past when I lay down to sleep. But Sybil and I on this subject had no confidences, though I could not see the lines closing together on her forehead, nor the painful, abstracted look upon her face without knowing how fully my apprehensions were shared. You might fancy that Jamie's first grievous imprudence—if we were even right in calling it by so light a name—was cause enough for our alarm—but it was not. All of us were young, all buoyant, hopeful, ready to forget what misery lay in the past; but it was not easy to forget the living present every-day watcher, stalking with his fixed look by our door in these autumn nights.

I had come home somewhat late on an evening of early October. Business was over in the warehouse, and its doors secured, and

windows darkened for the night. A little tired with a long day's labour, I went slowly up the stair in a vacant mood, counting the steps unawares, and much inclined to be languid and weary, and dismiss every graver feeling from my mind. They would be at tea I fancied, in the long bare room above, and my imagination realized the deep corner of the settee, and a cup of tea by way of accompaniment to the book I carried in my hand, with indolent pleasure. My thoughts relaxed and loosened from their bondage, lay still within me; and my usual indistinct fear had fallen entirely to rest.

But I found Sybil sitting alone by the table, and when I came in she looked up to me with a face which startled me out of all my vacancy. Her teeth were ground together—her features fixed—her very form seemed to have grown angular and lean in its intense control and bondage. "What is the matter?" I exclaimed hurriedly.

“What should be the matter?” said Sibby, her white lip curling with almost sinister expression from its close pressure upon her teeth, as she tried to smile. “What should be the matter? Shall I fill you out your tea?”

I took it from her hand, and sat down in silence. Not another word passed between us for nearly an hour. All this time, I could do nothing but observe her stealthily as she sat before me. I have watched many feminine hands pursuing their sempstress toil; but I never saw needle fly as Sibby’s did, never such a twinkling rapidity of the small white fingers, never such force applied to work so gentle. And I saw her foot pressing painfully upon the floor, her elbow drawn against her side, her figure stiff and rigid, and contracted. The whole attitude was terrible to see.

At last she started up, laid the work away, went to the window, returned again; she could be still no longer.

“What is wrong, Sibby?” I asked again;

by this time my voice was hoarse, and the candle on our table burned drearily through the darkness of the fireless room.

“God knows—God knows!”

What terror was in that voice—what a flood of agonizing fears—I cannot describe. I can only remember how it rung into my heart.

“Sibby!”

“He came in here in the forenoon—came up to say he would not be back to dinner, and did not know when he might return,” said Sibby. “It could not be later than eleven then, and I have not seen him since—have not seen nor heard of him since—and now it’s nearly nine at night.”

And she wrung her hands in a fever of agitation, which now would conceal or control no longer.

“Where was he going?”

“He would not tell me—he would say nothing. I ran down the stair after him, and he almost commanded me back again—only I could see

great distress and agitation in his own face. Oh, Willie, Willie, I have looked for it long—it's come at last."

And Sybil sat down once more with white parched lips, trembling and faint, and again we sat still in the strange conscious silence, which seemed to watch us like a spy.

"I cannot bear it," cried Sibby, starting up again, "I must go out and seek for him. No, Willie, no, let *me* go. I will be easier, far easier—let me go. I cannot sit still now—I must see for myself."

I had stayed only at her request, and because I had lost all knowledge of Jamie's haunts. I yielded to her now, because I dared not resist; for I saw that some exertion was needful to save her from positive delirium.

She went away, flying down the long stair with a step which scarcely seemed to touch the ground; and taking my hat, I waited to let her reach the bottom before I should myself descend. When I was half-down, Sybil rushed

upon me, coming back again. She said nothing when we met—she only clutched my hand, motioning me back, and again I obeyed.

“Donald Clerk and another—a stranger—are walking up and down past the door,” the words came slowly through Sybil’s parched and breathless lips. “They are waiting there for him. What are we to do?”

We stood and looked at each other with blank faces, and Sibby’s feverish hand fell from its grasp of mine. But I turned without a word, and ran down to the street; only one explanation could be given for this watch.

When I emerged from our entry, my eye met the full look of Donald Clerk. A subdued triumph, fierce and harsh, was in his face; but even then I could see that this triumph gnawed at his heart with pain which counterbalanced all.

I made a great effort to collect myself—though I believe with very little success—and then I stepped forward at once to Jamie’s persecutor. “What is it—what do you want?”

With a strange malign earnestness, Donald regarded me. The stranger beside him mechanically stopped when he stopped, and we stood drawn up, fronting each other on the pavement.

“What do I want? I want your braw brother, Willie,” said Donald, “and am so resolute to see him that I’m waiting till he comes. I’ll not weary so soon as I did yon other night. If I had catched him then, we might a’ have been out of our pain, and less harm done. But what was to be, was to be, we may conclude, and I’m waiting on to see my braw manager. The business has thriven in his hands. It’s a pity a lad of his abilities should be held in such a limit as my warehouse; but we need not trouble you, Mr. Gentleman Brother—we can wait on the plain stanes oursels.”

“My ain opinion is we’re just wasting time, Mr. Clerk,” said Donald’s companion. “He’s no the fool to come hame the night.”

“It’s little you ken of this present game,”

said Donald, "he's the fool to do ony madness that has a chance of ruin in it. And then he has a bonnie young wife, and his brother here will have to be told; and how can he tell them, unless he comes home. Na, Jamie's no the lad to lose a chance of speedy destruction; he'll run his head into the snare a' the readier, because every mortal else would suspect it but himsel."

"And if you know Jamie so well, how do you dare to use such precautions?" cried I, vehemently, scorching tears coming to my eyes. "Will you tell me what he has done—will nobody have the charity to tell me what he has done?"

"My poor lad, you'll hear soon enough," said the stranger, whom I had at once known for an officer, but who at least was humane and pitied me. "A bill of Mr. Clerk's, here, was paid yesterday, part with an English note that I can prove to be one stolen from an English traveller little time byepast. It may be the young man got it lawfully; I'm no prepared to

say he was the thief—but I'm waiting to take him up on suspicion."

"And another bill of mine dishonoured this day," said Donald, "if you want to ken what *I'm* waiting for, that's the cause."

I was utterly stunned and struck dumb. I staggered back to the wall, and leaned there, in blind and dizzy misery. Jamie! Jamie! but the only cry my heart had strength to give forth was his name.

And then there came upon me the terror of this watch set for him. Where could he come but home to tell his ruin—to seek for means of escape—but his pursuers stood sentinels on the threshold of his door. For my vision was warped like that of every other to whom such a dreadful fate comes home—and I could not see how it was this official's bounden duty to use the best and most effectual means for the criminal's capture, whosoever's brother or husband he might be—nor could I understand at the moment any cause of lying in wait for our poor Jamie but hatred, malice, or revenge.

When I recovered from my first faintness I slunk again within the entry—I was afraid to lift my head, afraid to look up or down the street, terrified to hear steps approach that might be Jamie's. Behind me in the gloom, at the foot of the stair, Sybil stood listening—I went to her hurriedly—for there was a possibility of egress by a backway, which I had determined to try.

“There's a bill dishonoured to-day,” said I, in a whisper. “No doubt he's seeking for the money to make it up—and that is why they seek him—I must go, Sibby, I must try to find him, or hear of him, and do you wait till I return.”

Wait! she clenched her hands together with the impatience of misery—for waiting was the hardest trial of all.

About the back entrance the young clerk was lounging—but he seemed to have no orders to watch those who left the house—and I stole past him unobserved. I hurried first to the places Jamie had been wont to frequent in

his earlier youth—there he was not to be seen or heard of—and sweeping back in many a dreary circle, I came again and again to the other busy side of Princes Street to watch, with dread and excitement, our own door, and the two figures watching there. The night wore away while I went and came. At last I saw a conference between these two—and could glean from action and gesture that the officer was impatient and would not be detained—after a while he went away. It was nearly one o'clock then, deep midnight, black and solemn—and Donald Clerk continued to pace along before his warehouse door.

Such a night! traffic and pleasure faded out of the streets, late returning revellers ceased to startle the silence with discordant voice or footsteps. Stars blinked faintly through a misty sky, and the breath of the night came cold along the forsaken pavement. Through the stillness rang the heavy steps of Donald Clerk. I myself, sheltered in a doorway, watched him intently with mingled awe and savage excite-

ment. I had a dread of him, as of a spectre ; yet now and then, as my impatience swelled to fury, I could have sprung upon him, and torn him, like a wild beast, to pieces.

There is a chill in the night-air, a flickering in the darkened atmosphere like the faint lifting of an eyelid. Dim, hesitating, cold—yet it is the earliest look of day-light over the hills. The lamps begin to burn hazily as though they knew their hour was past—and creeping upon the blackness round us, comes up a pale grey, growing, so gradually yet so quickly, into dawn. The chill bites to your heart—so cold, so very cold—and something drearier than the deepest night, disheartening, dismal, desolate, strikes on the eyes that longed for morning, and have watched the darkness through.

At last—at last—even when my heart grows sick to hear a stealthy footstep drawing near—the dark figure opposite begins to move, begins to look round with long investigating glances—walks about a little with renewed alertness and scrutiny—pierces with keen looks into every

dark corner near him, finally turns with the most reluctant hesitation to leave his post. The steps die away again into the silence—a delusion of my own ear as there have been so many—but now I can hear the heavy march of Donald Clerk as he goes away. It takes me only a moment to dart across the street when his back is turned—and some one else seems to have been on the watch, for again the stealthy footstep comes nearer, and round the dark corner of the buildings on the North Bridge appears a figure—only a boy—but drawing close, gliding along under the shadow of the wall, till he comes to the entry where I stand.

A little pale boy, withered and acute; startled and half inclined to fly at the sight of me, he yet pauses to fix his keen eyes on my face; and recognising me as it seems, though I have never seen the elf before, he places in my hand a bit of white paper. “It’s from him,” said the messenger; and immediately turning back, he ran at full speed away.

I flew up the stairs with the missive; but a

breath upon my cheek and a glimmer of white against the wall struck me with strange fear. It was Sybil, poor Sybil, watching in the dark corner at the foot of the stair where I had left her; cramped and chill with her long vigil, she could scarcely move even when she saw me—but seeing my letter, pushed me on impatiently before, and followed with renewed strength. The door was open, the candle faintly flaring alone in the bare room. Sibby snatched the paper from my hands.

Glancing over it, she flung it down towards me, and hurried away. I read it.

“I have deserved some blame, and will get more. It is neither safe nor right for me to come home; fare ye well, Sibby; if I dare, I’ll write to you by-and-bye. I’m flying now to save myself, and to keep you all from open disgrace, so far as that can be. It is not entirely my fault—it’s not all me.”

As I read this paper, I heard a flying step
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traverse the passage—the outer door shut with a sharp subdued sound—a sound of haste and yet of stealth. Sybil was gone to seek her husband.

CHAPTER XIII.

GREY upon the sky break these pale streaks of dawn, and the dank air of the night, through which this early glimmer radiates faintly, settles down like heavy masses of black in every angle and deep corner. Towards the old town, threading gloomy closes, and flying over bits of old, dark, broken stairs like a spirit, pressing her sleeping baby to her bosom under her shawl, and bending her head forward intent and watchful, Sibby hurries before me, and her footsteps scarcely sound upon the streets.

Whether she was conscious that I followed her, I cannot tell. I believe she was con-

scious of nothing except Jamie—that he was gone she knew not where—guilty she knew not how! But her course was too distinct and certain to be a mere vague wandering after him; and I followed her with eager curiosity—almost with hope.

Till at last we came to a street descending from the High Streets—one of the Bows. Even here the miserable inhabitants had not wakened to the woes of the new day. Sybil rushed along the empty footpath with the certain steps of one who approaches her destination, and at last she made a full stop opposite the closed door of a little shop, on the step of which sat a solitary woman, crouching into the wall, with her shawl drawn over her head, and her figure perfectly still, so that I thought her asleep.

The house was old, built of wood and plaster, and coloured of a dull yellow. The closely-shuttered window of the shop projected a little from the wall—above that the next floor projected still further, rising at a height of two

other stories into a sharp gable, and close by it was the entrance to a miserable "close." Whose the shop might be—whether one of the low provision-dealers of the district, or some of the disreputable nondescripts flourishing in such localities—it was impossible to tell, for neither name nor sign appeared over the door.

Sibby stopped abruptly upon the broken pavement in front of it. I was close behind her. The crouching woman on the step stirred, put forth a hand, opened the shawl that concealed her features—and with astonishment and dismay, I looked upon that gray colourless face with its lowering brow and unwilling sullenness. It was Geordie Cockburn.

Elevating herself a little, she looked at Sibby eagerly; but Sybil scarcely looking at her, lifted her eyes to the closed windows above. "Oh! can you tell me where he is?—will you let me in?" said Sibby; and her low, thrilling whisper seemed to echo through the silent street.

“What do you want with my brother?” asked Geordie.

There was a pause—they looked at each other with keen investigation—each possessed with a secret of her own, which she trembled to give another the faintest clue to. Doubt and fear, and hard painful jealous suspicion shone out of both their eyes.

“Not your brother—I do not want him—I want my own. Let me in, that I may see if he is here,” said Sibyl, in a voice of command.

“This is Jamie Mitchell’s wife,” said Geordie. “Do you mean to say that he’s in this as well? Oh, pity on us—pity on us! for I kent they would baith gang one road. I kent it lang ago in my heart.”

The windows above were carefully curtained with dingy blinds, as if the inhabitants were at rest; but as these voices broke the silence, I saw stealthy faces peeping from the edge of the curtain, and signs of the most alert and anxious wakefulness.

"Let us in, Geordie. If my brother is here we have a right to see him," said I, interposing.

"I will not let you in. What's Jamie Mitchell to me!" exclaimed Geordie, with subdued excitement. "If Jamie Mitchell gangs an ill gate, he gangs at his ain hand, and is neither blinded nor led away. I have never kent his wife, and I'm no wanting to ken her. Jamie Mitchell's wife is naething to me; but I see in her face she'll cherish him, and take care of him as far as he'll let her, and will never put him in the way of evil; but there is a lad that naebody regards—that wife and wife's friends do a' they can to ruin, and that has nae thought nor wisdom to take care of himsel; and it's him that's in my mind. What's *your* brother, Willie Mitchell, to mine?"

"I have my baby at my breast—I'm ready for any place he likes to go," said Sybil, unconsciously opposing to one strong wild affection, half-delirious in its self-engrossment, the power

and might of another. "And I tell you I *will* see Jamie—I will know if he's here. I've waited for him this whole night, lang and weary as it's been—and many an hour I've waked and watched before, when every heart but mine was sleeping. Nobody has a right to bear his blame, to bear his burden like me. Will you bid him come out here, and say I'm ready, if you'll no let me in to see? Do you ken me, woman? I'll no be shut out. I will be beside him in good or in evil, wherever he may be! I'm ready—I'm ready—and the bairn's quiet and sleeping, and happed from the chill if he wants to go to sea. Tell him to come—I'm waiting on him—or let me in to Jamie mysel!"

How long they might have faced each other in this strange antagonism, I cannot tell, for Geordie had a secret—I believe unconscious—exasperation at Jamie's wife to aggravate the selfish strength of her anxiety for Tom. Heaven knows I mean no reproach to her

when I call her love selfish, for we two standing before her were as bitterly selfish in our interest as she !

But we heard a door open stealthily, and a footstep came stealing to the entrance of the close. Very different from the two others who waited for her was the woman who looked out now from the black chasm in the wall. A face of florid prettiness, unmoved and dauntless, with gay ribbons fluttering about her head, and some coarse ornaments of last night's toilette, corroborating a certain hungry wakefulness in her eyes as a witness that she had had no rest. Her feet were slipshod, her dress slovenly ; and turning from Sybil's paleness and Geordie's grey and clouded excitement, there was something feverish and hectic to me in the pink and white of the new-comer's cheeks.

“ Eh, preserve me ! Geordie Cockburn, what in the world brings you here ? ” cried the stranger, shrilly ; “ and wha's this ye've brought at this hour of the morning to disturb

the peace of the house, and Tam in his bed, sleeping like ony ither decent lad."

As she spoke, her shrill tones wakening up the street as the others had failed to do, some one knocked against the glass of the window over head, and shook a clenched hand at her. It was Tom himself.

"My name is Mitchell," said I. "We want to know if my brother is here."

"Let me in to speak to him," added Sybil, involuntarily shrinking back till she touched me, and feeling protection in the touch; "let me in for a moment. I'll neither plague you nor say a word, nor take notice of a thing in the house. I only want to see him, to beg him to come away."

"It's Jamie Mitchell's grand lady wife," said the woman, laughing. "I'll no say ony mair it was you that brought her, Geordie, for Tam swears you had a notion of Jamie Mitchell yoursel. Tam's roused out of a' patience because he's disturbed in his sleep. Do ye just hear him, the blackguard, how he

rattles on the pane. Gang in wi' ye to your bed, ye sleepy-headed vagabone, and let women folk abee. But 'deed ye never came to see me before, Mrs. Mitchell; and I'm no gaun to waste civility where I never got nane. What's my house to you? You must just gang off, my braw leddy, and content yoursel at hame."

"Let me see him—will you let me see him?" cried Sibby, imploringly. "He never said an ill word of you all his days—he never did an ill turn to any mortal but himself. Oh, woman! let me see Jamie—I want him to come with me, to go away among strangers. Do you hear me? You know what wrong you have done him, you and your house. Do you hear me?—I will see him! He shall not remain with you!"

And Sybil's face flushed with desperate excitement, and she pressed forward upon the mistress of this defended house—pressed forward, poor heart, with that confident strength of powerful feeling which cannot believe in

resistance to its own impetuous action. But the coarse nature before her had no apprehension of poor Sibby—and lifting a stout arm to guard the passage, the woman laughed shrilly in her face. Again Sybil fell back upon me—her slight frame thrilling with anxiety, with nervous agitation and deep shame.

Before I could interfere again, Geordie Cockburn rose from her crouch upon the step—rose into the flashing morning light in her gray pallor, like a lingering impersonation of night, and with an unfaltering hand put down the arm of her sister-in-law, and entered the close.

“Keep *her* away out of this den—it is not fit for her to come near it,” said Geordie. “I’ll see if he’s here—or, Willie Mitchell, you’re a man—you can come yoursel.”

Tom Cockburn’s wife made way for me; I entered—and Sibby drawing up her form wearily, held her infant close to her breast, and strained her eyes after us down the dark cave-like entrance. Fronting her stood the mistress of the house, a defender invulnerable, and not

to be assailed—for Sybil could have forced her way through a hostile army more easily than she could face this barrier of conscious, unashamed, undaunted impurity—for the noble simple nature which was her strength in every other emergency was her weakness here.

Geordie Cockburn passed on before me to the door, deep set in the thick wall, and almost invisible in the gloom of the passage, which admitted to the house. A faint struggling ray of light making its way through the closed shutters showed me the little shop, with its naked shelves, some trays of coarse lackered trinkets on its counter, and bits of broken metal encumbering its floor. Passing the open door which led to it, I followed my conductor up a narrow dirty wooden staircase to the room above the shop—a squalid room, wherein a broken and naked bedstead with high bare posts standing up against the wall, was the principal piece of furniture. The bed itself and two or three miserable chairs were laden with articles of dress—a most abundant wardrobe if it had

not consisted of articles so heterogeneous and unsuitable—while in the midst of all, Tom Cockburn, with his hand curved over his ear, stood eagerly listening and bending forward towards the door.

Geordie's entrance seemed to give him some relief, mine made him start back in visible confusion. With a curse upon her and a muttered, "I kent she would betray me," he drew himself back with a stealthy preparation for defence miserable to see.

"He wants to ken if his brother's here," said Geordie. "I've been watching at your door-step the hail night through, and never sought in to trouble you. But they have a right to ken if you've ruined Jamie. Is he here?"

"It may be already too late to save him—Where is Jamie?" I cried, eagerly.

"Jamie can look after himself—he's not here—I have seen nothing of him since the morning. What's the news—are they after him?" said the unhappy young man before me.

“What have you done?” said I: “if there is crime, tell me what it is.”

“What would you ask him for?” cried Geordie, interrupting me, fiercely. “What right have you to search into ither folk’s miseries? Be content with your ain, and take nae heed to ours. Tam, will ye come away from her—they’ll never seek you at hame?”

“I’ve nae pith away from her; I would just give in, and tell a’, and be banished,” said Tom Cockburn, with weak despondency. “I never was brought up this way, that I should ken—but she’s been in’t a’ her days.”

“Where is Jamie? what is it you have made him do?” I grasped his shoulder in involuntary fury.

But Geordie seized my arm, detached it from its grasp with flashing eyes, and grinding teeth.

“Would you touch him—would ye dare to touch him before me—and what’s your brother to mine?”

“I will call help from the street unless you

tell me," said I—and rushing towards the window, I snatched from it its dingy covering and threw it open. I scarcely know what length I might have gone.

As strong in their despair as me, they threw themselves upon me ; but the strength of Tom, miserable and unsteady, was nothing to the tiger clutch with which Geordie hung upon my arm.

"Tell me what it is, or I will rouse the street," I exclaimed again.

"Be quiet—will you be quiet?" cried the brother. "Geordie, let alane, he'll hear reason—what would you rouse the street for, breaking into a man's own house like this? Come in, I tell you—they're looking out from the close yonder—will you come in from the window? I'll tell you everything if you'll come in."

I withdrew from the window, and Tom himself put it down with stealthy care, and with his trembling hands again secured the blind. Geordie, meanwhile, sat down upon a wooden stool, and leaning her head upon both her hands looked at us alternately.

"I have neither asked nor sought to hear what it was this time," she muttered half to herself. "I ken it's disgrace enough and misery enough whatever it may be, and what good is there in asking what it is?"

"What is it?" I demanded again.

"Some fellows we ken got some notes," said Tom, faltering. "I wasna to ask where they got them, was I? It was nae concern of mine. I gave one to Jamie in the way of business. He kent less about it than me, till to-day, when somebody came seeking him to take him up on suspicion. Then I saw him for a moment in a desperate fright. I thought he was come to seek the other siller—but he had no mind of it, and went off like pouter, without so much as saying whether he had tellt upon me. It would do him nae good telling he got it from me. Willie, man, ye shall have every penny back if ye'll gie me warranty I'm safe, and that he didna say the note came from me—for I've put out none of the rest yet."

And, with the scrutiny of cowardly terror, Tom Cockburn peered into my face.

“Do you think I’ll consent to ruin Jamie and save you?” I said, and I set my teeth and threatened him with my clenched hand.

“Jamie’s ruined, do what you will,” said poor Jamie’s betrayer. “Ye need not think the money he lent me was all for me. Mony’s the pound-note I’ve seen him spend that would have been owing to me, if it had not been for the drafts we baith made on Donald Clerk. I’ll never ask for a penny that he’s awn me, and I’ll gie ye back every farthing to help Jamie’s sureties with what they have to pay; and I’ll neither make nor meddle with such-like things again, but make her give up the shop and flit into a room, and be the better of my fright all my days—man, Willie, if you’ll only pass me your word no to say it was me!”

My brow throbbed almost to bursting. I was so dizzy, that only by a strong effort I kept myself erect. I could not answer him—and

Geordie sat without a movement upon the stool, her eyes lowering out from under their grey heavy lids, through the bright morning air, upon her brother's miserable, pale, coward face.

"For I never kent what it was before," cried Tom, in abject supplication, "a jail, and a trial, and banishment, and my name in the papers, and a judge sitting upon me. I could not bear it, Willie Mitchell. I would rather die peaceably at once and be done wi't. Man, when ye canna save Jamie, what good would it do ye to ruin me?"

"If there was a robbery, who did it?" said I faintly. My tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. I could scarcely speak; and the scene which was really before my eyes contended with a dozen other scenes visible to my mind. Sybil in the street below—Jamie flying along some desolate way—then a prison—a crowded court—a sentence of everlasting dismay and dishonour to us all. My brain reeled—yet I was conscious of Tom Cockburn's look of cowardly entreaty and meanness, of Geordie intently re-

garding him, with eyes that burned and glared upon his face.

“It was her brother and another,” said Tom, looking round doubtfully, and sinking his voice, “if they were weel banished or hanged, it would be salvation to me, and a real benefit to the country, Willie. I wouldna forbid your setting the officers after *them*, if I could get clear out of the road first ; but, man, we were very good friends long ago, and Jamie and me have been great cronies a’ our days ; what guid could you get of ruining *me* ?”

“Have you any clue to where he is ? did he tell you where he would go ? I’ll never meddle with you—only tell me this,” exclaimed I.

“No, so help me —” said Tom, vehemently, “he would not say a word—he never waited, but was off like a flash of light. No—I would tell you in a moment, Willie—but he never breathed a word to me.”

I turned to leave the room, for then I remembered my poor Sybil waiting without, and here there was no more to say.

But Geordie rose noiselessly and arrested me. Her motion was so rapid, so sudden and silent, that I had scarcely moved myself when I was stayed. She turned upon her brother, and stood between us, calmer than either, lowering upon him with a desperate frown.

"I kent you was in some danger. I couldna rest in my bed. I came here in the middle of the night to see what would happen to you, and help you in extremity if I could; but there's worse things than jail and judgment. I would bid ye escape from them—man, if ye could but escape from yoursel—ony place—to the end of the world! If Jamie Mitchell's innocent, and it's you that's to blame—gang wi' him this moment and be disgraced, Tom Cockburn, gang and be banished—gang and be a discredit to everybody belonging to the name; but dinna be a miserable villain, and let anither man suffer in your stead."

"Woman, he's escaped! and, Geordie, hear reason—I couldna save him," cried the culprit. "Ay, he's your ain joe—you could

find it in your heart to gang and give up your brother—but I defy you baith—ye canna save him.”

Poor Geordie, furious and mad, thrust him violently from her, and rushed before me down the stairs. I followed, little less excited. When we reached the entrance of the close, Sybil was gone, and Tom Cockburn’s wife, darting past us, returned to her own house, and closed, in the black recess, the side-door. We were left alone in the streets, now brimming over with the full morning sunshine, and already beginning to wake into life and motion—standing alone, looking with doubt and distrust into each other’s eyes.

CHAPTER XIV.

“I THOUGHT I could leave him,” said Geordie, “I thought I could gang away now, and help you to look after Jamie, and leave him to his fate ; whatever ill he gets, it’s nae mair than he deserves ; but I cannot do it, Willie Mitchell. Guid help us ! what do we a’ deserve, if we were to get naething but that ? And the waur we are, we need the mair compassion, and he’s driven out of his wits with that ill woman, and has naebody to look after him in this world ; I canna gang. I’ll take my seat again, and see that nae ill comes over him till a’ body’s up and waking. I’m no a coward in the day ; it’s only in the night ; and

when the hail town's astir, I'll gang hame to my wark like ither folk; but I canna leave him. If Jamie Mitchell gangs wrang, it's a' his ain wyte and blame, for he had a guid bringing up, and a wife like yon, that I would do anything for mysel; though I dinna ken her, and dinna want to ken her—if she belonged to me, I would try my ain sel to please Jamie Mitchell's wife. If he's gane wrang, he deserves nae pity; he deserves to bear his burden himsel—but Tam—Tam. Will ye gang away, and look after *your* brother? what have you ado with mine?"

And turning from me, as if she spurned me, Geordie cast one wistful, desolate look up towards the windows, and sat down again abruptly on the step. Looking back when I had reached the end of the street, I saw her there fixed like a statue, crouching close to the wall, with her covered head and veiled figure, the little street still vacant and empty round her, and the early sunshine falling chill upon the stones.

For my own part I knew not what to do, nor where to turn. Jamie had left us without the faintest clue—with just such abruptness and mystery as gave full sway to the imagination, and depriving the mind of all other powers, strengthened the might of fancy, and surrounded us with visionary horrors. Could he have found a ship ready to sail, and be already far away at sea, bound for some unknown distance, where we should never hear of him more? Could he have wandered without aim except to hide himself, away to some remote district—some such secluded place as the deep inland country still hushes in its breast? Could he, dreariest of all, have rushed into the eternal silence, wildly intruded himself into God's awful presence, and lie now under the river, or in the sea, hidden from the eyes of heaven and earth, from the keen scrutiny of love and fear? He might be at my very elbow in some one of those dark abysses of living misery and crime, herding among other wretched hiders and fugitives; he might be already a hundred

miles away, miserably travelling upon his aimless journey with the pursuers at his heels; he might have fallen into their trap, and be secured, a hopeless prisoner now; he might be lying somewhere turning a ghastly forehead to the skies, safe in the hold of death. Shuddering, with dews of deadly pain upon my face, I sped along the wakening street; she might be—I knew not what—anything or everything was possible to the complete darkness of his fate.

But first I went home, passing with a tremor the closed warehouse where his evil fortune had been accomplished, and hurrying up the long cold stairs where Sibby had held her dreary watch last night. When I reached the house, the plaintive cry of Sybil's baby was almost comfort to me; it told me that she at least had returned to the house.

Entering the room, I found her busy with such a bundle as she had once made up before—tying it with the trembling fingers which were not retarded in their rapid motion, though

they shook so nervously. And Sybil was very pale, though perfectly calm—in a state of the most intense and delicate wakefulness, as if her frame was all ear, and thrilled to every breath of sound, however faint or far away.

When she spoke, her voice, though scarcely above a whisper, was so singularly rapid and distinct, that it pierced my ear like an arrow, yet seemed somehow to hush every other sound, and absorb all distant voices into itself, leaving the air clear and vacant for Sybil's intense listening. Her own movements made no noise in the long bare apartment, which the very sunshine could not enter, and where, unbroken by person or shadow, the clear shaded light fell full over the little table, and the empty chairs, filling the room in every corner as with a silent watching presence—the great clear-sighted day.

“I am almost ready,” said Sybil; “he might go home. I have some hope he is there; and I'm going away to Ailieford at once. They must all know, Willie, or I would not go to risk making

your mother as wretched as me if he is not there. If he has not come, I will be back at once ; you must stay and see if he comes here — or ask — can you ask at any place where Jamie might be ?”

“ We have no clue,” said I.

“ We must find him,” said Sibby ; “ either he will fall into the hands of these men, or by-and-bye he will wander home. Willie, I know him ; I know he cannot go away and perish alone— I know he will bear many a thing, and go through great distress, but never come to desperation, or anything like that. He’ll come home ; I know he will, Willie—and then we’ll have to fly again.”

“ And you will go with him, Sibby ?”

For a moment Sibby’s features worked with strong feeling. “ What would he do without me ?” she said with a long sigh ; “ and though Jamie has folk in the world besides me to care for him, I have nobody but Jamie. I am ready now ; don’t bid me stay ; but take him away to some secret place if he comes,

and be here to meet me, and take me to him at mid-day. Mind, unless he's at Ailieford, I'll come back then."

The baby, hushed and quiet, was once more wrapped in Sibby's shawl, and her bundle slung upon her arm. When she had almost reached the door, she turned back, and held out her hand: "Good-bye, Willie. I may never see you again."

Yes, she might find him, and they might go away, not knowing where they went. Tears came to my eyes, hot and painful. Sybil only looked at me with a most pitiful smile in hers, and then she was gone.

I lingered for a short time, debating what I should do myself; we had no clue, and ignorant as I was of the associates whom Jamie might have found in Tom Cockburn's, it seemed vain to go forth on a vague quest, to look for him among the streets and closes as if he were a strayed child. But I remembered where I myself fled in my misery, and hurrying out I sought again the dewy hollows

of Edinburgh's guardian hill. Working men, bound for their morning's labour, met me on the daylight streets; children, fresh and rosy, began to stray out from low doors and courts to their early play. All the elastic revival of the morning, sleep-refreshed and hopeful, surrounded me; I drew my hat over my eyes and hurried away.

No footstep yet had brushed the heavy dew from the long bending blades of grass, which clothed the little glades and secluded glens hidden among the folded slopes of the hill. I rushed through their calm cold windings—I paused at every little mound, I examined every twisted knot of grass. Above me the sunshine lay broad upon the crest of the couched lion; here all was in shadow, deep and cold, and wet with dew; but not so much as a footstep—not a span of sod, like Gideon's fleece, where form of living creature had kept the herbage dry, was visible as mark or sign to me. I wandered up and down, away into the light, which I could almost fancy caught

me like a guilty thing, and exposed me to all the world—scrambling upon the crags and abrupt descents of the hill, hither and thither, a shadow in the sunshine, a wandering ghost in the shade; but I saw nothing to tell me that any fugitive had sought this solitude before.

When I was about to return, standing on a rocky mound, looking down to where a broad level road stretched away into the quiet country at my feet, I was startled by one passenger upon the way. A man about Jamie's height, I thought, and not unlike my brother in appearance, with his coat buttoned close over his breast, and his hat slouched upon his eyes, walking steadily on, with a subdued and suppressed haste in his gesture and action, which impressed my excited feelings powerfully. I flew from my elevation, and descending to the road, made a sweep round to meet this solitary passenger in the face. The longer I observed him, the more did my heart beat with hope that it was Jamie; for these long swift steps, which devoured the way, avoiding so carefully

all appearance of unusual speed, could only be the steps of one upon whom some extraordinary impulse pressed. I met him suddenly, coming from a cross-road, which I myself had gained, at a headlong race from the foot of the hill. When I came upon him, he lifted up a dark, startled, guilty face—not Jamie's—but, without doubt, the face of a fugitive. Only a moment—but I believe my appearance fixed itself upon his memory as his did on mine—we passed, and, immediately turning round; each of us bestowed a stealthy, jealous look upon the other. Something of the freemasonry of great and strong excitement, gave us insight, strangers as we were, into each other's spirit; and I was as thoroughly convinced that this man was fleeing from the consequences of some crime, as if he had paused to tell me his story—fleeing with the long silent strides which did not dare to quicken into visible flight; fleeing, counting every step, as the distance lengthened between him and his pursuers—between him and those whom he had wronged,

Foiled and disappointed, yet having a certain satisfaction in my disappointment, I turned again to our desolate home. Ascending the stairs, with a suddenly quickened and active interest, half expecting to find Jamie there before me, I found Donald Clerk in conversation with Sybil's maid. The girl was excited and curious, but could tell him nothing of course save that the house was empty—that we were all gone; and Donald Clerk stood grim and wakeful—he had kept watch all night no less than ourselves—upon the threshold, with Jamie's keys in his hand.

“Have you found him?” I exclaimed. I was too much at a loss myself, to reflect how different would be the issue if it was Donald Clerk who found him, and not his own friends.

“I've had no troke with traitors, a' my days,” said Donald, “and I want to have no hand in making them now. You may answer me safely—do you know where he is?”

“No.”

Donald eyed me doubtfully for a moment. "It's not that I wanted to be told. Do you ken—answer me yes or no."

"No."

Donald drew back, and admitted me into the house. "I hear his wife is away seeking him. Worthless as he is, I would give a' the siller, to see him once laid up and safe—for I would drive no man into desperation. I would not do it even to him, for all the ill he's done me; and you needna kill yourself, laddie, nor let yon bit genty creature upbraid me with slaying her. I'm doing nothing but what is needful to preserve and take care of my own gear."

"No one blames you," said I, drearily; "trust me, if this frightful dream turns out true, no one will have leisure to think of your share in it. You persecuted him with your suspicions—but fact and reality seem to have come upon us now, and you can do nothing either for or against us."

Casting up his head into the air, Donald turned away from me with a snort of indig-

nation. "You 'll be ill enough, my man, and far enough cast down, before I come in to offer you consolation again. Wha's heeding if you were a' at the bottom of the sea—you and your confounded pride? I thought you might have learned humility by this time; but there's maybe a lower and a lower deep waiting to bring you to your senses yet."

I heard him, but the words made no impression. I wandered in languidly, and threw myself down upon the settee. What was Donald Clerk?—what were all Tom Cockburn's bugbears — judge, jury, newspapers, neighbours, all the world? Faint upon my worn senses came all these secondary things—all the humiliation and disgrace to which our house lay subject now. I thought of himself—himself, himself alone—and all horror and misery appeared to me concentrated in Jamie, though I would have walked a hundred miles for one sight of his face. But in my heart I laughed, aloud and bitterly, with desperate contempt, that we could be thought capable in

this extremity, of wasting even wrath or hatred upon Donald Clerk.

Every moment of that time seems to me now exaggerated into hours, but I fancied I lay long in this listless and benumbed inaction. Then I suddenly started into fear wilder than ever. Yes, in the broad daylight, under all the open eyes directed upon his desolate house, Jamie might even now come home.

So again I sprang to my feet, and hurried away. The warehouse doors were open, the windows unclosed, the porters in the cellar, the young clerk at his desk. I saw a group of by-standers slowly disperse from the cellar steps as I came in sight—they looked at me with curiosity, sympathy, interest—they had been hearing the whole; and the clerk hovered about his desk, unsteady and nervous, keeping constant watch upon the window; and out of the little green-curtained den where Jamie had reigned two days ago, appeared the grizzled head of Donald Clerk.

And Jamie might come here—might come

upon all these eyes that watched for him, might cast himself headlong into the very centre of the snare, in a mad attempt to reach the home which now could be no sanctuary. I rushed along Princes Street, searching every face I encountered with wild looks and terror, and yet I knew very well I should not find him there.

Then I hurried to my own employer's office, and explaining in some incoherent way that my brother was in trouble, obtained, with a little difficulty, from my sorely-puzzled and half-kindly, half-disapproving master, permission to devote the day to my own business. After that, I spent two hours or more wandering about the streets, coming back and back in a desolate march to the warehouse, where watchful eyes continually gleamed out upon me. I dared not leave this point of observation, though at last I began to be sure that Jamie, however sorely baited, would never turn his hunted footsteps hither.

I thought the extent of a day had surely

past, and wondered impatiently why the sun remained so high in the heavens—why Sybil did not return according to her promise? But it was still only eleven o'clock. The noon meridian had not yet brightened upon the morning; and sickening of my vigil here, I turned again abruptly towards the old town, and Tom Cockburn's house.

The street was full of traffic now—full of noise, of squalid profusion and miserable poverty. Loud with street cries, and full of a din of voices, its close-mouths swarmed with boisterous children—with wild, half-grown girls and lads—coarse savages about whom there lingered not a trace of the fresh beauty of youth. I missed the sentinel figure on the threshold of Tom Cockburn's door. She had left her watch—for even poor Geordie would have been out of place in such an attitude now.

The shop was open, the doorway encumbered with some of those lounging youngsters, male and female, who abounded in the street.

In the window, were the cases of lackered trinkets I had caught a glimpse of on the counter before; but save for these, the shop was empty; and within stood Tom Cockburn's wife, leaning over the counter, with her face of unwholesome prettiness and her tawdry dress, discoursing with animation to a little group of listeners. I heard some part of the story as I advanced.

“ Our Tam and him had been great friends when they were baith laddies, afore I married Tam; and the tither ane took up with some puir handless thing of a lassie, that could gie him nae assistance in keeping a house. So you may just think what kind of a condition Tam, being a feeling lad, was thrown into this morning when we were knockit up out of our warm beds, at three or four o'clock, to ask if we had seen onything of this puir castaway, Jamie Mitchell. I said, atweel no; we kent naething about him, and that I wouldna hae my man keep company with such folk; for I aye kent, from the first time

I saw him, that Jamie Mitchell would come to an ill end—I saw it in his face.”

I went in upon the little crowd like a wind. I only remember restraining myself with desperate self-control—I cannot tell what emotion might be in my face, or what in my excited appearance; but they scattered before me with looks of curiosity and fear, and the woman started back with momentary dismay, and exclaimed: “Guid preserve me, wha was looking for *him* !”

“Where is your husband?” I asked abruptly.

“Where is my husband? Where should he be but at his wark like ony ither decent man? And what was you wanting with my husband, if ane might be bauld enough to spier?”

“Only this,” said I, trembling with suppressed fury, “to let him know that he is entirely in my power; and that if his wife thinks fit to use my brother’s name, as she has just done, even to such a contemptible audience,

I shall use my power to its full extent without hesitation or compunction—that is all I want with him now—but beware!”

Before she had time to recover breath, I had left the street again, glowing with a sudden burst of rage. Alas! rage was a short-lived passion—a kind of opiate for the moment, weakening and miserable in its end. And I had gone there with again a faint hope of hearing something—a hope now utterly lost. Jamie, Jamie!—where was he?—where could he be?

CHAPTER XV.

It is past noon, and I am wandering now like a ghost, abstracted, and separated from the whole world of life around me, upon the long, level, unshadowed road which leads to Moulisburgh. The trees that lean over these garden walls, so scanty in their sear and windworn garments, throw only a distinct outline of long bare bough, and fluttering separate leaves, but no shade, upon the glowing pathway under them; and looking along its length the eye meets no relief—nothing but the dusty line of road, where scarcely even a passenger breaks the sunshine, and the full meridian skies,

blazing and sultry, even in this October weather, with the flush of noon.

Oh, tedious, weary day—oh, light that never will decline into the waiting west! Within myself I pine and long for the kindly shades of night, and wherever I turn, I see before me a vision of a bare, unsheltered road, of a solitary travelling figure, detected and blazoned forth by this pitiless, unshadowed light. I see behind, like so many traces of his track, the print of his long, hurrying footsteps in the white dust on the way. I see the shadow of his figure gliding on by his side, like the inseparable guilt which will not be dissevered from his company, and I see the sunshine peering in his eyes with malignant laughter, mocking him to scorn who ventured to hope that such a fugitive face could be concealed. Oh, merciless bright day!—oh, silent nature, curious, open-eyed, continually looking on! I feel as if myself were a centre of observation for a hundred keen beholders, and every one

has spied my secret out, and every one knows more of it than I.

But along this path before me comes poor Sybil, solitary, returning once again to search for him whom none can find. Her poor weary arms still close jealously upon her breast, as if they enclosed the child, and she says to me, with a half complaint: "Your mother kept the baby. I mean—I thought it was best to leave it to be taken care of—and now I'm free to seek him anywhere. Where shall we go?"

"There is no word of him at Ailieford?"

"No word—no word," said Sibby; "but your mother is making your room ready herself, and is watching to take him in secretly if he should come. He will not go to our own house now, Willie, I have made up my mind to that. He will go home to Ailieford—and I said we would both be there to-night."

"But will he come home at all?" said I, doubtfully.

"Yes," was Sibby's instant answer, "I have no fear; it may be days yet—and oh, Willie, Willie, what must he be suffering now—but unless they take him—unless he's in their hands—he'll come home."

We paused for a moment in sight of the sea. Gliding along over the calm blue water was a ship, the sole wayfarer upon that other high road. I saw a long shivering sob swell the breast of Sibby. I felt my own heart leap with a wild inquiry. Softly, calmly, so slow and gentle that it almost seemed as if we could stay its course by one strong cry, it glided away under our eyes into the broad horizon, out to the boundless sea. Was he there—could he be there?

But we returned together silently to the hot Edinburgh streets. Sometimes I was the guide, sometimes Sybil—from close to close, from wynd to wynd, along the lofty Canongate, across the breezy bridge, past our own door, over the bright, thronged pavement of Princes Street—sometimes pursuing a passing figure

which we thought we could recognise in the distance, sometimes peering into dark entries, casting wistful looks on curtained windows, passing every place that lay in shadow, or that looked as if it could harbour a secret, with jealous interest—a throb of anxiety, a pang of reluctance to leave it unexplored. I felt myself examining the very faces, careless or self-occupied, that passed us in the public ways. I thought they could not fail to bear some mark or trace, if Jamie had been seen by any, the most indifferent spectator eye of all these strangers there.

Till at last my own emotions sank and subsided into an utter weariness. The blood grew stagnant in my veins, the heat left my face. I looked at Sibby—but Sibby said not a word of any languor that might be creeping over her. Now and then she folded her arms again, as if seeking for the comfort of that baby pressure on her breast, and her pace waxed slower and slower, and heavy sighs of exhaustion began to swell out of her heart. We saw the warehouse

closed under Donald Clerk's own scrutiny. I saw, approaching nearer, a hungry look of dissatisfaction in his eyes, which convinced me that Jamie was still untraced, unfound. But when his locking and closing was accomplished, he himself went away. I hurried up the stair to discover if any one had been inquiring for us. There was no word, and Sybil's maid told me with some fright that she had been ordered by Donald Clerk to admit one of the porters into the house to stay all night. The girl, in terror of her mistress' displeasure, had still not dared to disobey "the maister." I reassured her—and hastily making up a parcel of some of my own books, and some of Sibby's little personalities which I could not bear rude hands to meddle with, I hurried down again to rejoin my poor sister in the street.

It was now nearly dark, and again assuring ourselves that Jamie, if he came back to us at all, would certainly seek his safer country home, we set out for Ailieford. And Sybil's excitement too began to wane into the prostration

of utter fatigue and weariness. We went by the coach to Moulisburgh. It was some slight relief to both body and mind, for, though I continually caught sight of wayfaring figures, and faces half revealed in the darkness, it was impossible to indulge our fever of examination here; and Sybil hid her face, and would not look at the roadside, where there constantly appeared something to stir every pulse in me.

We left Moulisburgh—we went out into the dark night again—and I began to pursue another line of thought. I tried to persuade myself that it would be better if he died, and was hid by the beneficent earth for ever. I tried to think it would be less affliction to hear of him dead, than to receive him with terror and secrecy into his ruined home—and immediately another vision started up before my fevered eyes. Darkness, deep and silent, dreary branches fluttering down their worn leaves on the wind, clouds upon a wild, wan, moonlight sky, veiling it, like the lifting and closing of the

lids upon affrighted eyes, from something that looks up, white and ghastly—looks up with steady, motionless horror from the wet and shrinking earth. Oh, gloom and darkness, dread and terrible, which may hide from me at my very feet this ghastly pallid face! Oh, night! dark, brooding, spectral watcher, full of startling sounds and touches, overbrimming with the secret which those thrilling whispers on the wind perchance might tell me if I had ears to hear!—and my heart that sickened of the day, sickens again, with fear and trembling terrors, for the comfort of the light.

How we paused at every rustling among the dropping leaves, how we held our breath when distant footsteps seem to ring out of the darkness, to crash upon fallen boughs, or mingle with the tinkling of unseen rivulets by the way—and how we sometimes started, thinking we felt human breath upon our faces, and paused to say his name, in a loud and anxious whisper, almost believing that he was there, I need not linger to tell. A lifetime's passion

and suffering lie in these days and nights, and every hour of them is fresh before me, real and present as when they were; but I have not space to dwell on all their prolonged and extended pains.

The light burned faintly in my mother's window as we came in sight of Ailieford, and more faintly still a dim glow of firelight glimmered from the room which Jamie and I once shared. The window of this room was close upon the garden wall—removed from the road, however, and half concealed by the branches of the pear-tree—and curtains had been hastily put up, to guard it still more effectually within. A dark figure under the wall wakened into slight and stealthy motion as we approached. It was my father himself, on the watch for our unhappy prodigal.

“No word of him—no word of him,” there was nothing else said on either side.

Without the door, my mother also met us. Silent as we were, and subdued in every sound we made, my mother's anxious ear had caught

the faint stir of our approach. Her eyes were unsteady and moist, full of great anxiety and excitement, but I could see she had been endeavouring to deaden with occupation the hunger and the thirst of anxious thought. Within, the baby cried feebly for its nurse, and I saw it was comfort to Sybil to gather it once more into her weary arms.

The table was spread for us—not without need, for I had fasted the whole day, and Sybil, still less able to take necessary nourishment, was nearly fainting with exhaustion ; but our souls loathed the needful food. My father returned to his watch—my mother, anxiously attending to us, laboured with feverish impatience to restrain every sound, but could scarcely subdue her own fierce irritation when Marget, excited into strong curiosity, and very well perceiving the unusual excitement upon all our faces, made errand after errand of investigation into the room. The falling leaves without were torture to us, so were Marget's restless stirrings about her kitchen ; and, indeed,

every sound and motion which distracted us from our strained and eager listening, though that very strain was enough to give an exaggerated distinctness to every sound.

"Have you heard anything but from Sibby? Does Andrew know?" I asked under my breath.

My mother answered, "No," and added instantly, "What would you tell Andrew for, Willie? I could bear his judgment on my poor laddie worse than a stranger's, and though it ruin us, let us pay everything ourselves."

"But Andrew must know," said I, "it is impossible to hide such a thing as this. Every neighbour we have will know it, mother."

"I will go to Donald Clerk myself to-morrow," said my mother. "I had made up my mind to do that—and undertake to make up every penny if he gives us time. We can go together, Sibby and me. He likit him, Willie, gruff as he was. What mortal didna like my poor misled bairn? It can do the man no good to prosecute and hurt him, if he takes our

word for the siller ; and we can say Jamie had to leave his situation, without telling anybody what was the cause."

"Mother, it is useless to deceive you," said I, "everybody in Edinburgh that knows Jamie knows the story by this time. I saw a little crowd hanging round the porter's this morning, and even Tom Cockburn's wife tells it to her wretched neighbours after her own fashion. We must make up our minds to it, mother. Donald Clerk will prosecute—will persecute, will do everything he can against Jamie—and has a full lawful claim upon us for his money besides. Everything must be known."

Hot tears came to my mother's eyes—disgrace was dreadful to her. "Still we will go to Donald Clerk the morn," she said. There seemed a kind of satisfaction in determining that.

To get Marget, full of suspicion and curiosity as she was, to go quietly to rest at her usual hour, was no easy matter. Upon one pretext after another she prolonged the night, till sheer

weariness closed her unwilling eyes. Then Sybil, worn out too, consented to leave us. My father was already in bed, and I lay down upon the sofa, to make up as I could for the vigil of last night and the painful fatigue of to-day. Withdrawing her candle into a corner, that no light might be traced by Marget if she woke, under the parlour door, my mother sat down, having opened the window a little, that she might hear more distinctly, to keep her solitary watch. The household noises were entirely hushed. No sound came into the partial gloom of the parlour except the falling of withered leaves, the other faint indiscernible voices of the night. I tried for some time to keep up my own nervous susceptibility to these faint manifold sounds ; but sleep came upon me in spite of myself—sleep heavy and unbroken—till suddenly starting up in the early daylight, my eye caught the glare of my mother's unextinguished candle, and her own wakeful face. A closed Bible was on the table beside her. She had not been able to read even in the

great book of comfort, and just now she was wiping away tears from her eyes. It was not weeping—only slow drops flowing out under her eye-lids—a constant heavy dew, bitterer than floods of tears.

I had slept, I was refreshed, and something almost hopeful came to me with the morning light. I went away to the room prepared over night for Jamie, to arrange my dress. The fire had died in the grate; but I could not keep my eyes from the little ministering appendages of comfort which my mother had gathered into the unused room. Her own elbow-chair had been placed before the fireplace; the pillows on the bed were smoothed and arranged in their snowy covers, as only her own hand could do it; curtains hung before the window, a rug lay behind the door, ready to be spread at its foot to keep out the intruding draught, and to keep in the betraying light. Had Jamie come home in prosperity and blameless, not half of these arrangements would have been made; but the heart that bled for him, yearned over him with

more exceeding tenderness now than at his happiest time. These cares were all unconscious attempts at compensation for the misery he had brought upon himself—the misery he had inflicted upon us.

Going down-stairs again, I found and was able to take the breakfast my mother had provided for me. I had found invigoration in my rest; and, wearied out with thinking the worst, began involuntarily and unawares to rise into what, in the circumstances, was an extravagance of hope. I even thought that Donald Clerk might relent.

My mother and Sibby were to come to Edinburgh at the midday hour, when I could have leisure from my business to go with them to the warehouse—for I had no resource but to return to my ordinary work to-day. I left Ailieford with a lighter step and a lighter heart. The morning air around me was full of elasticity and hope.

In Edinburgh, I went first to the house, to see if any word had come or any message—a

fruitless errand, now when the place was under surveillance ; but still a slight expectation fluttered about my heart as I did this, though to myself I called it only a matter of form. There was nothing, of course ; and the porter who had watched all night for Jamie followed me down the stair.

“If he had come, I wouldna have keepit him,” said the man, in a half whisper, “let Donald Clerk rampage as he may. I’m wae for the haill family of you, and I never saw ill of him, I’m free to say ; but it’s my hope he’ll no come the morn’s night ; for though I would have let him off, like in an unpremeditated way, this ae time, I canna undertake my maister’s bidding another night with a purpose in my heart against it. I am no wanting ony bribe. I’m a decent man, Mr. Mitchell.”

“It’s no bribe—no bribe,” said I, returning my half crown—it was my last—upon his not-unwilling hand ; “it is but for your good will, Geordie—and say as little about him, poor fellow, as you can.”

CHAPTER XVI.

"WELL," said Donald Clerk, bending over the high railing of his curtained enclosure, and leaning forward with both his arms upon its upper bar. "What is it you want with me?"

The young clerk fidgetted at his desk, drawing nearer and nearer with eager curiosity. Turning suddenly upon him with an oath, his master motioned him away.

We stood ranged like culprits or suppliants—as indeed we were—before him. My mother held my arm, and Sibby stood at my other hand, with her baby in her close embrace once more. His great height enabled him to look down upon us all three; but his eyes and his

tone presaged us no favour. I began to regret that I had not more decidedly opposed the enterprise.

“It is what I have heard of my son,” said my mother. “God knows what he has done, and naebody seems able to tell me; but whatever it is, it must look a dreadful thing to himself, for he’s left us all without a word. I’m his mother, and that’s his wife, not to speak of Willie, that has thought so much of him a’ his days; and you may just think what misery we’re in, neither knowing where to look for him, nor what’s hanging over him, nor where in a’ this weary world the unfortunate laddie may be.”

“It’s easy telling you what he’s done,” said Donald, “I’ll give you that satisfaction, mysel. I put him in trust here in my warehouse, partly seduced into it by the smooth tongue this other son of yours has in his head, partly by a folly I had for himsel, weel as I kent, and little as I thought of him. Being here, he’s betrayed his trust. No to speak of a dissipated life, which I

partly expected, my money's been used for his ain purposes, and for worse purposes than his ain; my good name's been compromised by stolen siller put into circulation through its means; my credit's been risked—no thanks to him that it's no lost—and, lastly, kenning his ain guilt he's run away, and left a deficit behind him, close upon a hundred pounds. It's what they call embezzlement, for a finer word—I say plain robbery; he's stolen this much of money from me, besides all the rest.”

My mother put out her hand angrily as if to stop him, when he reached this point. I myself felt the most abrupt and strong denial struggling to my lips. Sybil alone stood unmoved, looking up to him. She had made up her mind to any force of words.

“It never could be for himself; oh, man, you ken that as well as me; it never could be for himself,” groaned my mother. She had come to this man a humble petitioner, and she ground her teeth unconsciously together as she

felt that she dared not defy and deny his harsh judgment on her son.

“Have I anything ado with his vagabone friends?” said Donald Clerk, “me that have been famous for an honest man, if for nothing else, all my days. Am I to have a pack of scoundrels making up their deficit off me—taking *me* for a conveniency? Hang them a’ loons and robbers! it’s time they kent what manner of man they had to deal with. Do ye think I believe he’s cheated me clean out of his ain head, or was present in the body when the English traveller was robbed? I think no such thing. But will ye tell me that a man that takes my siller to throw away among a gang of thieves—that risks my credit to support them—that mixes their ill-gotten gains among my lawful substance—do ye think that’s a man I could trust with my business for a day?”

“No! no! no!” cried my mother, eagerly.
“No, I wouldna bid you, I couldna ask you.
No a man you could trust, and you an upright

merchant, with your credit in his hands ; but oh, a poor beguiled, simple-hearted laddie, to have pity upon, and deliver and help out of the snare ! He's my son ; maybe I canna see right and wrong as I could do in another case ; but I think if I had but heard of him in this strait—some other poor woman's son, and nae friend to me—I could plead for him on my very knees. Two-and-twenty years ago, this very month, I got him first in my arms—and oh, for the sake of the heart of flesh within ye, and for the sake of the mercy we a' have to look to ourselves, have pity upon my poor laddie's youth. I canna ask you to trust him again—I wouldna bid you trust him again. I'm only saying, spare him—spare him—for the sake of all the numbered days that are appointed to him in this world ! It's little to ruin a man of years, for naething can keep him long out of the grave that is prepared for his rest ; but them that have a lifetime to run, years and days that neither grief nor disgrace can shorten, if God's will be not so—oh, for pity to them and

mercy and deliverance! You shall never lose—no the value of a straw by my son. If I should toil with my ain hands, and work my life out for it, every farthing shall be paid; but oh, have pity on us and the laddie, and take nae vengeance on him.”

Unconsciously the tears flowed down my mother's cheeks, and she shook them from her fingers as one by one they fell over her hand. With her moving features, with her streaming eyes, with her whole heart and soul moved from its balance and transferred out of the quiet regions of ordinary life to such a passionate earnestness as absorbed every power, she looked up into the heated face of Donald Clerk.

The flush of excitement was on his cheeks, the lurid glow burned fiercely under his heavy eyebrows. “I'm a man that's shut my heart to friends, and kin, and human kindness this many a year,” said his strong, husky, determined voice. “This laddie once again came in to what heart I have left—I likit him—I tell you, be it for your comfort, be it for your tor-

ment. I set my mind on doing one good turn to let my life be minded by. *Me!* as if I had not tried before and found the milk turn gall before the sour visage that is my fate. I tell you I set my heart on seeing him a prosperous, well-doing man. If few folk have ever pleased me all my days, fewer yet have ever cared to try; but I can tell ye this of myself, which maybe no other living man now kens of me, that where I do put my favour, I put it without bound. This laddie might have been like a son of my ain. What did I give him the house for, but that he might be guarded from temptation! What did I put him in this trust for, but that he might feel himself a responsible man, and have a motive strong enough to keep him right. I set my heart, my mind, my whole will and purpose on it. Look how he's paid me. His brother here took it on him to reprove me once for minding my miserable siller when Jamie was in peril. Do you think it was my miserable siller alone that moved me? Do you think it was not in my mind

that every sixpence he spent of mine was on his heart and on his conscience, an eating canker, and that my trust was a curse to him? Ay—he was weak as water, a reed wavering in the wind—I'm a man of iron, past feeling, no to be moved by heaven or earth; but, I tell you, feeble as he is, he's broken my strongest purpose, like a willow wand; fool as he is, he's turned my wisdom into a jest and mockery—my blessings into curses, my kind thoughts into cruel devices, snares for the feet I meant to set free. My ain very words bear witness,” said Donald Clerk, through his set teeth, with a fierce smile on his lips. “I *meant*—I had will and purpose of kindness to him—but the weakling with my ain very weapons has foiled and baffled me.”

I myself listened breathless to this strange address, and even my mother quailed before the passion which, now she knew what root it sprang from, she herself was hopeless to subdue. Sybil looked up tearless; she was the only one among us able to speak.

“ When I knew Jamie first, I was a stranger to him, like you, but I thought there was no other like him in all the world,” said Sybil, turning the face, over which a faint delicate flush stole as she spoke, towards Donald Clerk, and looking full into his eyes ; “ I had neither mother nor friend. I was content to have nothing on this earth but him. I thought though we would be poor, we would live the grandest life that mortal folk can live. I did not think of common days, common needs, and common faults that belong to us all ; what it was I looked for I cannot tell—maybe it was all folly too, and what wise folk would not take the pains to understand ; but you know this day as well as me what I got instead of it. ‘ I have got misery and disgrace, and want and ruin, a heart broken, a little bairn destitute, a house forsaken by the head that should have guarded it from every ill. But I—me—if it would do him good or give him pleasure yet, I could find it in my heart, not to cast off Jamie, but to serve him on my bended knees !”

The red light of Donald's eyes melted into compassion. "Poor thing," he said gently, "you belong to him—you're his wife—you follow your ain nature—but a woman's no rule to me."

"Mercy and vengeance are God's own instruments," said I, "when you can have choice, take the noblest—take the one that God Himself delights to use. See what horror he must have been in at his own guiltiness before he went away, leaving us neither sign nor trace to find him. By this time, if he is living, he is destitute, solitary, miserable; he has separated himself from all the world, he has not a hole to hide his head in—he dare not come back to us—he dare not cry to you for pardon, though the wrong he has done you, kills him; his name is lost—his character is lost—his heart and his spirit are broken—his means of bread are taken away. Be content—leave him to us now to heal him and comfort him, if he ever comes to us again; leave him his freedom—leave him in God's hand to be punished for his crime. Have pity upon Jamie for pity's sake."

"Destitute, solitary, miserable—by as much as this is different from the way I would have seen him, if his will had not beaten mine," said Donald, relapsing into stern composure, "just by so much, laddie, is my mind removed from pity. I ken no pity; except it be for the women belonging to him, that suffer in his stead."

"Oh, man!" exclaimed my mother, who had taken some comfort, I thought, from my appeal, "had ye never a little brother yoursel?"

"Ay—and his name was Jamie," said Donald. Clerk, turning round upon her with that hopeless glow in his eyes; "and never let one that minds me of him look for pity from me."

He sat down abruptly, and bent over the books again upon his desk—a sad and silent troop we went away, one after another—there was no more room for hope, unless the desperate one of escape were open to us still.

I saw them turn their faces homewards once more with a feverish revival of expectation—hope it could not be called, eager and anxious as it was—they might find Jamie already returned;

for Sybil's certainty that he would return remained undiminished, and my mother, unless when her heart sickened with dark surmisings, confirmed Sybil's thought. I could not avoid noticing the conscious looks which Ballantyne, our head clerk, and my own junior in the office, turned upon me when I went back. The youth's scrutiny of my appearance exasperated me. When I raised my head from my work, or from the long fits of musing into which I sometimes fell, I invariably caught him ending an examination of my face, and the haste and stir with which he resumed his own occupation filled me with impatient rage. Ballantyne was more serious in his curiosity; he had known life longer, and misfortune and crime were not strange to him. Mr. Middleton, I saw, was in a little ferment, eager to say something, but not knowing what to say, and withal—I believe he himself was quite unaware of the feeling—a little watchful and a little suspicious of myself. My blood boiled with vain anger; I longed to throw off every restraint, to

relinquish indignantly the trust which could not be left to me without a momentary faltering—but Jamie, Jamie—I could not disown *him*. I could not call upon my fellows to witness that I was spotless, while he was guilty. No, I would rather have rushed upon all the indifferent world, ringing his name into their ears, and proclaiming myself his brother, than I would have hesitated to acknowledge him. So I sat at my desk quietly, feeling the burning glow upon my cheeks carry fever into my eyes, and tremor into my hand. I bent down my head steadily, shaded my brow—would not see what looks they turned upon me.

And I, too, set out again homeward as night began to fall, with a hasty step and an expectant heart. This time my visions were all of meeting him at home—of his haggard face, his despairing eyes, his hopeless resignation—for he only could come home to be taken or to die.

On the road, while still I was nearly a mile from Moulisburgh, Andrew met me. He said

no word of greeting—neither did I—but he turned back abruptly, and walked on by my side in silence. Then when we came to a part of the road entirely clear of passengers, Andrew turned upon me as abruptly as before: “I suppose it’s true?”

“Yes.”

Nothing more was said for some time—the magnitude of the misfortune cowed all small repinings into silence.

“And what will they do to him?” said Andrew in a faltering voice.

“I cannot tell—somebody spoke of banishment—I suppose only the jail and ruin, and everlasting disgrace,” said I almost in a whisper.

“Ay!” Andrew drew a long breath; it made more sound in the air than our conversation had done.

“Would nothing induce Donald Clerk to give up the prosecution?” he resumed in the same tone.

"Nothing ; we have tried him to-day," said I ; " he will have no mercy ; but Jamie is not taken yet."

" Jamie will be taken," said Andrew angrily ; " what a delusion to build yourselves up with ! Do you think he has wit enough to elude a search like this ? I know better. But the money is lost ; if we could only keep the case from coming to a trial. I would not care to see Donald Clerk myself."

" It is quite useless ; he will hear nothing—and if Jamie is taken, it must come to a trial," said I.

Another long silence followed ; and I thought something like a " poor Jamie," and deep sighs of natural feeling, faltered through the early gloom. We walked on silently past Andrew's own door, and Andrew's shop. He took no notice of them, nor of any one we met, but went on with me towards Ailieford. By-and-bye I could hear him begin to mutter, consoling himself, as in lesser cases I had seen my father

do, by grumbles of irritation. We walked very quickly, and I will not say that Andrew was less anxious than I.

“I suppose when I have come so far, I had better go in, and see if there is any word,” he said, as we drew near Ailieford. It seemed a kind of unconscious apology to himself.

But there was no word, except the slowly subsiding alarm and excitement consequent upon a visit of search made by the officers in quest of Jamie, in the beginning of the day; and my father again stood upon his dreary post as sentinel by the wall. I said I would relieve him instantly, and hurried in to say a word to my mother. Andrew sat down for half an hour, bit his finger points, muttered to himself, grew grey and pale with anxiety he would not own, and then shaking hands with us all, abruptly hurried away.

And I took my post within the garden wall, where I could watch all the modes of entrance, and hidden in the thick hedge of lilacs might be myself unseen. The window was open

again in the parlour, open in the room up-stairs, which now we began to speak of with a certain mystery, as if already our secret was enclosed within its walls. The night fell, dark and starless—and with a faint wind whispering over my face, and the lilacs rustling round me, with their falling leaves, I was left upon my watch alone.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE sky is dark overhead, and full of clouds; faintly, half-revealed here and there among their broken edges, is a glimmering, solitary star. A world of darkness, blending the great elements into one dim void, where nothing but sound has definite existence, lies around me and before, and looking out over the wall, it is all I can do to trace the path immediately below.

But sound is rife; the leaves, the droppings of water, which you might seek for vainly in the daylight, the innumerable stirs and pulsations of all the great unseen country round. A free heart, perhaps, might call this silence—

to me it tingles, every breath of it, with noises that stir my heart—noises all the more powerful for the stealth with which they creep upon the ear, so that I can fancy a faint, weary, dragging footstep stealing round and round continually under the garden wall.

Voices come up at last from the hidden road, figures emerge out of the gloom; what do they speak of, unaware what hidden spy and eavesdropper keeps watch above. I knew it before they came in sight, and could almost leap madly down upon them and strangle this first speaker. I knew there could be but one thing to speak of here, and that is the ruin and misery of Robert Mitchell's youngest son.

His youngest son—Benoni—son of our sorrow—oh, my brother! and my weary heart melted as the voices died away again into the darkness, and my tears fell like a shower upon the wall.

Hist! a sound upon the road—a sound!—where everything is sounding, stirring, sending up muffled voices to the skies. Be still! some-

thing is here more than there was a moment since—human breath—human motion—I feel it in my heart ; and with desperate hands I clutch the leaves to stay their ceaseless rustling as they fall, and clasp my side to keep down and subdue the heart that beats like a muffled drum in my ear. Again—was that a sigh faltering into the darkness, afraid to trust the very solitude ? I dare not stir, lest some other ear, watching like mine, should hear me move ; —again—again—so faint it might be but a crackling bough disturbed by an insect's weight —but I know it is a human footstep drawing near the wall.

Oh, Heaven, what fearful lingering moment, what void worlds of delay ! I dare not move—I dare not breathe—I dare not lift my head to see ; but hush ! I hear his breathing now—I feel him rest upon the stones—another pause—another faint, half-drawn, exhausting sigh—then a sound bolder and less uncertain—his foot is on the broken stone projecting from the wall. I see his hand creep to its ledge—I see

him rise slowly, fearfully, and gaze into the gloom. Whose is the eager projected head—the form that rises so close to my lair? but I hold my breath with desperate force and tension. I tremble lest this pulse of mine, throbbing and rushing like a stormy river, may startle the fugitive away. Now his foot is on the uppermost ledge, his form rests against the wall of his father's house. Familiar to it, he leans upon the strong pear-tree boughs, gains the window of the prepared room, creeps like a thief within—and I may dare to brush the heavy drops from my forehead—dare to sob into the darkness, and thank God—thank God; he has returned.

Another cautious moment detaches me from the clinging lilacs—another, and I am looking in through the open parlour window upon the pale and anxious conclave there. “Hush! he has come—I have seen him to his own room!” My abrupt whisper conveys nothing more than this—it is enough to send both Sybil and my mother, stealing like ghosts upon the jealous

air, up to the room which holds something more tangible than our untold secret now; and I, returning to the garden, suspicious as spies and secret workers are, grope round with outstretched arms among the trees, crush my hand along the wall to be sure that no one has watched there but I, and stalk about the flowerbeds in the dark like a haunting spirit. Everything is dark, void, lonely, though my heart chafes with a fantastic dread, that streams and leaves and rustling branches, everything that stirs and sounds with a new meaning now, are telling each other in this perpetual babble, that the fugitive has at last reached his home.

But still I linger here—still would be content to keep my watch and shrink from the meeting within; he *is* within—safe, and sheltered, his wife's arms, and his mother's, clinging round him with misery and with joy—and I try to persuade myself that now more than ever should the watch be set, the house defended. Alas, vain heart that longed for what it dares not face!—a throb of deadly pain comes swell-

ing up upon me out of the depths of my own soul—and it almost seems to me—to me who half an hour ago yearned for him with infinite longings, and thought no misery so dreadful as our uncertainty—it almost seems to me as if there could be no torture like meeting him now ; and I mutter to myself, “ if it was but over—if it was but over,” and what I mean is my first look on Jamie’s face.

At last, gaining courage, I steal up to the closed and muffled door—I feel that some eye, watching from within, defends the darkened passage and the silent staircase, and noiselessly my mother admits me. They have set him down like a sick man in the great chair by the hearth ; already a little table by his side is spread and laden ; his overcoat, wet and soiled, lies aside in a corner ; his shoes have been loosened from his weary feet ; and the light of comfort plays with child-like smile and glimmerings, as though it fain would cheer him, upon his haggard face.

His haggard face ! Oh, pity, what havoc

has been here! guilt gnawing at these bloodless lips, terror glaring, furtive and sidelong, out of the downcast eyes, misery on the wan and furrowed forehead, want and pain and weariness throned in the hollow cheeks. His very limbs hang down with a hopeless rest and languor as if once thrown into an attitude of repose they could be content to lie there far beyond all revival, whatever death or torment might threaten their inaction. Gaunt, worn and wasted, his whole frame of bone and sinew, developing itself out of its shrivelled covering as years of ordinary life or ordinary misfortune would have failed to develop it—he lay in the great chair before the cheerful hearth—lay in a heap, careless and hopelessly despondent, as a hunted animal might throw itself down to die.

But he lifted his eyes eager and watchful and suspicious, as the door opened to admit me, and I saw a strong shiver pass over his frame. The eye fell, the head hung upon his breast, the poor faint limbs drew up with a weary shuffling

motion. Alas, this drear spectre—this guilt that stood between him and every man—it made him shrink even from me.

I took his hand between my own, and held it there ; and with a pang of selfish misery, I saw him sink back again into his chair—I say selfish, for I felt myself capable of any lie, any deceit that would have given him comfort, and could almost have rather borne to do him injury than to see him lost in such hopeless, helpless suffering. Small generosity it would have been to say, I would rather have endured anything in my own person—my own person could never have presented such a spectacle to me as Jamie's did ; I could not at least have *seen* its full extent, and dwelt with my eyes upon its utter misery—and the pang sickened me to the heart.

“ My poor laddie must have rest to-night,” said my mother under her breath. “ Your bed's ready, Jamie, my man. Take something to strengthen you, and then lie down and get well rested—you'll be better the morn.”

"I'll never be better, mother," said Jamie, faintly; "and it would be the only good turn I could do myself and everybody here to die before the morning comes."

"Oh, Jamie, whisht! if you kent how everybody has watched for you," said Sibby.

"Do you think you need tell me that," said our poor sufferer. "Do you think I did not see every one of you in my own misery, making me madder and madder when I thought upon yours; and now I've come home—I've come home, mother—to do nothing but disgrace and ruin the house that shelters me."

"The house that shelters you is your father's and your mother's, where you have a right to hide your head if you were the wildest sinner that ever broke God's law, or man's," said my mother firmly. "You're no that, my poor, heart-broken laddie. You've gone sair astray, and sair have suffered for it; but there's aye mercy, Jamie—there's deliverance for whomsoever returns—and, oh! I canna tell, I dinna

ken—but there may be hope even for this life yet.”

“Rest, rest, mother—let him get rest,” said I. I could have said any vain comfort to him myself, but I felt what an impossible hope it was when I heard it from my mother. “Think you are safe, Jamie—try to feel that you are safe—and we will speak about what is to be done next when the morning comes and you are refreshed. I think we should not let him weary himself more to-night. We should leave him now, mother, to sleep.”

We did after a little interval; and Jamie’s eye flashed with a little pleasure when Sybil said she would sit by his bedside and watch. He was afraid to be left in the darkened room alone.

The poor young wife kept watch above, my mother resumed her’s below. We who had to go forth to the morrow’s every-day labours, lay down to take what rest we could—and so the night passed over our heads again.

A little after daybreak, we sought Jamie's room. He was up, nearly dressed, and sat before the fire silently holding his child, and gazing in its face. Sybil, moving softly about, put the room in order. Marget, once more roused and suspicious, began to stir below—so we spoke in whispers, watching the closed door.

“What now?” said I; “what is to be done now?”

Jamie turned upon me his languid eyes. “Whatever you all think best,” he said, faintly. “I am past caring for anything but rest—rest and quiet, and refuge, Willie; but if you think I should, I'll get up again, and go away.”

And he turned to where his hat and coat lay on a chair.

“Oh, Jamie! if we could but keep you canny here till the blast blows by,” said my mother; “but it's not ourselves we have to think of, nor what we would like best—it's your ain safety, my poor laddie; and I doubt—I doubt there's little safety here.”

"Am I to go away?" said Jamie. He turned his back half upon us, and there was a sullen dreary despair in his tone. "Here, Sibby, take your bairn. She'll have no mind of me when she comes within the reach of shame, and you need never tell her who her father was."

"Where her father goes, we go," said Sibby. "Hush, put down this. We cannot go now—we must wait till night."

I put my arm round him, and drew him back to his chair. He yielded to me passively, but yet Jamie held his head away.

"Your plan must be to rest all this day," said I, assuming a greater firmness and confidence than I felt. "Try to sleep, to get thoroughly rested and refreshed, for I dare not bid you stay till to-morrow at home. They will track you here, Jamie—and you are young and must live, and be free yet, for Sibby's sake and ours. I will buy another dress for you in Edinburgh, and Sibby must change hers; and this night, if you are able,

you must go away on your journey. If you could get to Glasgow safely, there are always ships ready to sail—or you might get into England easier, Jamie. Tell us, which will you try?"

"Would Newcastle be a good place? for my father had a sister there. She was poor but she might shelter us," said Sibby, eagerly. "She wrote to my uncle a year ago, and I would have gone to her but for Jamie. It was a very kind letter, and I mind the place and the name. Would Newcastle do?"

Jamie's interest was gradually awakening. "We might go from thence to London, or even get a ship to America," he said.

My mother's face grew blank and white. "I might as well die and part with him once for all, an auld woman like me, that can never hope to see him back again," she murmured, half-aloud. "But the life that lies behind me is before you, Jamie. I'll never put your mother in your road to put you in peril. Amen, and God bless you,

bairns; and keep you safe coming and going, and grant to you a new life—for I'll never see my son back in the house where he was born."

"Who can say that?" said I, endeavouring faintly to lighten our sad talk. "If Jamie gets clear away, we'll be thankful, mother, and forget that we're parting with him, for joy that he's safe himself; and then the game is in his own hands in the new country; and two or three years' striving may bring him home again."

"But, Willie," said Sybil, "the means? How are we to get the means?"

"I will try that to-day," said I, hastily, perceiving how Jamie shrank. "Now, mother, I must go away—and, Jamie, try to rest, and be ready for your journey."

He held out his hand to me as I went away. The heavy lethargy was breaking, his own interest in, and anxiety for, his escape was reviving once more.

My mother followed me, wiping the tears

from her eyes. Sad was the necessity which compelled her, with eagerness, to speed her son away on a journey from which she could never expect him to return; but she said nothing further of complaint or repining. "I can give you a pound or two for his change of dress; but where can you get money enough to pay their passage in the ship?" she asked me when we had reached the room below.

"I must try Andrew," said I.

"Andrew!—and he's bound for the debt to Donald Clerk besides. Andrew—is there nothing we could sell ourselves?" said my mother, "for you see he's away from us now, and has less interest, Willie—though, to be sure, I was better pleased last night."

"Andrew is anxious and alarmed, and would do anything to keep this from coming to a trial," said I. "We can perhaps make it up to him afterwards, mother; but we must be glad to take it wherever we can get it now."

A short, suppressed sob was my mother's only answer, and she began to make preparation for my breakfast silently. I went out myself, to be sure that no trace of Jamie's entrance remained upon the wall. There was none; but returning, I met Marget in the little dark passage, between the kitchen and the parlour.

"I dinna want to see which of them you are," said Marget, with a little start and scream, putting up her hands before her eyes, but not till she had reserved abundant time to convince herself that it was me, "for I hear nae word of what's gaun on, and I'm no gaun to force my road into a secret that I'm no good enough to be trusted wi'. Gang by; ye needna even touch me, for I'm close to the press-door—and I dinna want to ken ye against your mother's will."

"You know me well—it's only me, Marget," said I.

"And how am I to ken which it is that's only you? Ae brother's voice is gey like the tither. I canna swear to onybody in the dark.

Eh, waes me! to think a body may be ten years about a house, and never have their value kent a' the time! or that naebody has the discrimination to see that the mistress herself would betray ony of the laddies sooner than me!"

And Marget went away to her kitchen, in a little fever of indignation. She was indeed perfectly trustworthy, but could not suffer us to remain ignorant that our secret was in her hands.

Going in, I reported to my mother this little scene, and Marget was now of necessity received into the family councils; at least was told by authority everything which she could not fail to find out by means of her own curious senses. I left Ailieford earlier than usual—the purchase I had to make was not a safe one, and I had considerable fears whether it could be possible to make it unobserved.

Near Ailieford I again encountered Andrew. Andrew had slept little that night, undemonstrative as he was; but he gave no utterance to

his anxiety, except in a single authoritative "Well?"

"He has come home," said I.

Andrew shrunk close to my side, dragging me away from the hedgerow into the middle of the road. "Are you mad?" he exclaimed, in an angry tone. "How do you know who may be watching here? He has come home; but he's surely not such a fool—nor you either, Willie—as to think he can stay there."

"No; we have planned that they should resume their journey to-night. But, Andrew, only you can devise where the means are to come from," said, I, anxiously: "they will push on as far as they can go on the Berwick road to-night, and get by that way to Newcastle, where Sibby has some friends. It is an out-of-the-way place—they will never be sought for there—and I think perhaps they may hear of a ship to Canada; at least, they can go from thence to London, and get one there. But to do all this, Andrew, they must have money, and *we* cannot possibly get it, you know."

"To save a trial I would do anything," said Andrew, hastily, "I would not put it even in Christina's power to say that I had a brother a convict. I will try to get it; but for mercy's sake tell them to be careful, and not risk themselves on the road. I suppose his wife is going with him. Well, it is safest, though it doubles the expense. You can come in to me to-night, and I'll try to get you the money, Willie; and don't lose a moment in getting him away. I'll be miserable till I hear they are out of the road, and fairly shipped and off on their journey, if indeed they can be safe even in America; but Donald Clerk, for his own sake, will not send after them there."

"Will you not speak to Jamie one word before he goes away?" asked I, "there is little chance that he will ever reach home again."

"It would do no good," said Andrew, moving away from me, uneasily. "I should only be finding fault, and getting into hot water with my mother. No, no, it is better we should not meet. Tell him I hope he'll do better

for himself in the new country than ever he's done in this, and that I wish him well and safe there."

We walked in together silently to Moulisburgh—scarcely another word was exchanged between us—and we parted at Andrew's door.

CHAPTER XVIII.

To lull the suspicion of our constantly-wakeful pursuer, I went to Jamie's house, to make the usual inquiry. I took care that they saw me passing by the office-door, but I did not dare to lift my conscious eyes, and meet the look of Donald Clerk. Feeling this fierce investigating look upon me, as I passed the door going away, unawares I slightly averted my head; even that action, faint as it was, I afterwards thought, might have quickened his suspicions; but I dared not reveal my face to him.

From thence, as was necessary, I went to

my business, there to subject myself again to the galling observation of my fellows—the involuntary coldness and suspicion of my employer—no slight or light addition to the other burdens Jamie had imposed upon me. Escaping eagerly in the evening, and taking the most circuitous route I could find, I sought a shop in the old town, where I managed to purchase Jamie's disguise. It was only an undress suit, something half-way between the every-day fustian and the Sabbath-day costume of state, which a young working-man might wear ; but never midnight thief stole along the streets with his spoil, more guiltily, nor with greater fear, than I did with my purchase. Gaining the Moulisburgh coach at last, and having met no known face in the way, I drew my breath somewhat more freely, and, taking an inside place, and laying my bundle under me on the seat, I managed to attain some degree of composure and steadiness before my meeting with Andrew. But Andrew, too fearful for himself to hazard

me in the lighted shop, where my errand might be guessed or noted, waited for me in a dark corner near the coach-office, and making a sign to me as we passed, went away towards the Ailieford road, whither I followed him, carrying my bundle on my arm.

Obeying his imperative gesture, I joined him in the middle of the road. "Hedges may have ears," said Andrew in a whisper; "and though I am ready to do anything to get Jamie away, I do it against principle, and would not like to be known giving a helping hand to defeat the ends of justice, even for my own brother. Yes, Willie, you may look as you like, but you and me are two different men. See—in this parcel there's notes for thirty pounds—it's a great sum for me to raise on two or three hours' notice; but, for pity's sake, now that you have the means, get them away."

"It is a clear, good night," said I, "and Sybil, in extremity, can do more than many a strong man. They will start as soon as

it is possible, do not fear—and God send them safely to their journey's end."

Andrew made no response ; but, as we walked into the darkness, and I thought of their dreary midnight journey, my heart sank. When they went away they left us for ever. Yes, whatever deceit my mind might be stimulated to, to cheer my mother's faltering, or shake the deep despondency of Jamie, I could not deceive myself ; and it was but too fully and clearly evident to me that this farewell, unless by the alternative which I shuddered to think of, was a farewell for ever.

When we were about half-way home, Andrew suddenly stopped. "If I go, I will do more harm than good," said he abruptly. "I did think I would like to see him once again. But what's the use? I would only be in everybody's road, and in my own ; and I would be sure to say something my mother would not like to hear. No, I'm best away."

I did not oppose him. Andrew turned back to his shop and to his business, to his sepa-

rate family and home. I, holding the money in my breast, and carrying the bundle, like a thief, under my arm, sped into the darkness to hasten our poor fugitive away.

I found all exactly as I had left it, except that Sybil had exchanged part of her own wardrobe for some dresses of Marget's, scarcely less plain, but in taste and form widely different from hers. And Jamie's face had wakened up into eagerness and excitement ; and my mother went about the house, seeking out little comforts which might be added to their bundle, and quietly wiping from her cheeks the tears which made no demonstration, yet would not be restrained. My father, too, strayed about like an uneasy spirit, breaking in upon our whispers with a voice which he could not change out of its natural tone ; and now and then, solicitous, but ignorant, making some impossible suggestion, which brought an impatient word, instantly repented of, from my mother's lips. We had all the sad excitement which precedes a long parting, a perilous journey ; and it was

dreadfully heightened by the circumstances under which our travellers went away.


They had gathered round the table in Jamie's room to the last meal we might ever partake of together. There was little said by any of us—faint attempts now and then, more pathetic than downright weeping, were made by Sibby and my mother to keep up the strange, happy, half-articulate communication with which mothers respond to the infant's claims upon their attention ; and Sybil's baby bounded and leapt in the arms that held it, and stretched out its little hands to us with such an innocent exultation as made us turn to each other with blank faces, and filled our eyes with tears. Sometimes my father interposed some directions about the road, and where they might get the Berwick coach when they were sufficiently far from home. Sometimes my mother repeated : " You'll write yourself, Jamie, when you get to the end ? " Sometimes Sybil asked if they were likely to get a ship at Newcastle, and how long the voyage would be. Conversation

we had none ; the last opportunity we might ever have of speaking to each other—but save for those faintly spoken questions and plain scarcely necessary words of direction, repeated to break the dreary silence till they lost all sense, and no one heeded them, we were dumb all of us, and could not speak.

We had arranged that they should not go away till it was nearly midnight, of which it wanted still three or four hours ; and Jamie had not put on the dress I brought him, nor were their final arrangements made. But going into an adjoining room in the dark to bring something they wanted, I was startled by a faint light shining in from below. I hastened to the window—some one carrying a lantern stood in the garden underneath. I did not venture to look out, and ascertain who the intruder might be ; but screened myself first behind a half-closed shutter, and peeped cautiously from its edge. At first the light was directed upon the path, that the person who carried it might have sure footing—then I heard that a stealthy

footstep made its way to the low parlour window; but the shutters were closed; there, nothing could be seen. There was a pause; I could not doubt of intent listening—but here again the eaves-dropper was foiled. Then the steps came creeping back till I again caught the outline of the figure, and saw the moving light. But—whether it was an unsteady hand, or something defective in the lantern, I cannot tell—the light which was meant to guide him to our secret suddenly revealed his own—and flashing upward for a moment, disclosed to me, fearfully absorbed, and quite unconscious of the sudden illumination, the face of Donald Clerk.

Had he tracked the culprit home—had he followed him, as he threatened, to the very innermost sanctuary to snatch him from his last hope and shelter? or was this a mere vague errand of inquiry—an indefinite investigation? Arrested as by a spell, I stood motionless, watching. And just then my mother, with whom the constant tension of



fear had at last settled into a kind of custom, losing a little of its trembling insecurity, called me in a voice slightly elevated out of its whisper. The whisper itself, I began to fancy, sent its shrill echo further than a full tone; but I could see by the start and instant elevation of his head, that Donald's ear had caught this sound.

Closing his lantern, I saw him withdraw a little further back to look up to the window at which I stood. I could now see nothing but the outline of his figure against the sky; but I could see that his keen eyes were attracted by the faint light stealing through the curtains of Jamie's room.

The window was so closely shrouded that only the keenest observation could detect any light within—eyes of love, sharpened by fear—eyes of feverish suspicion, prompt to detect everywhere the secret it sought to discover. Examining it narrowly as I could fancy by the length of his pause, and the attitude of his head, he at last drew near the wall, and


mounting up as Jamie had mounted, listened at the window-sill. If he heard subdued voices there, it was but for a second, for my mother had come to my side in the darkness, had seen the spy, and hurrying to the door, had beckoned Jamie away. She now returned steadily, but with a strong tremor upon her frame; and a moment after, Jamie and I standing together by the dark window, heard her talking in her usual tone to Sibby, and after a considerable interval, carrying the light, they went down stairs.

Baffled once more, after a little pause, Donald descended, and bent his steps towards the front of the house. I began to be persuaded it was mere investigation, and not certain intelligence that brought him here, and so far we had succeeded in keeping our secret.

Accompanying Jamie, who was now greatly excited and very nervous, to his room; and bidding him assume with all speed his new dress, I went myself to the front of the house,

following Donald Clerk. He had found out already the unshuttered, uncurtained kitchen-window. I opened softly the unused "front door," which the rounded projection of the staircase entirely hid; and gliding out into the gloom behind him, stood among the trees, watching what he watched, and with still greater interest keeping my eye upon himself.

Marget has drawn her deal table before the fire, that she may see better the business she is now about, for no candle aids Marget's evening labour. And spread out upon the table, its long skirts depending, and its buttons glittering in the fire-light—stained with mud, and creased into many a hopeless fold—Marget is brushing with all her might, and vainly attempting to smooth into decent order the great-coat—Jamie's well-known garment—which Donald Clerk has seen coming and going at his warehouse door for many a peaceful day. All unconscious of the eye that flashes out a glow of fierce satisfaction



at sight of this sure token, Marget carefully smoothes and brushes, with something of the half-fantastic delicacy of tenderness which dictated to my mother so many elaborate preparations for our poor prodigal's return. And the cheek of the spy without reddens with excitement, and his eye glows fierce and lurid under his heavy brow. His prey is in his very grasp.

Only another moment, and Donald, almost forgetting caution in eagerness, has hurried out by the little gate which admitted him. I followed him so far, and now saw him passing along the road with such a wild, impetuous speed, as filled me with terror. I myself rushed back again, called wildly on my mother and Sybil, and hurried to Jamie's room.

He was standing there in the dark, deadly pale ; and as I entered, the coat which he had been about to put on, fell from Jamie's trembling fingers. His whole faculties were stupefied with fear.

"Instantly, Jamie, instantly—you must go

away!" cried I, breathlessly — and I forced the coat upon his shoulders. Sybil came in then cloaked and ready, her face very white, dilated and determined, her baby in her arms, her bundle in her hand. The weakness of our excitement steadied before her. We both of us grew soberer—more aware of what we did.

I can say nothing of the parting. My mother herself, with a breaking heart, hurried us away from the door, and scarcely dared to linger to trace the last echo of our steps as we disappeared into the darkness. My father walked on steadily and quietly by Jamie's side. He whose business called him out frequently at night intended to accompany them a considerable way. I whom Donald Clerk knew to have no business in Aillieford which would lead me from home at such a time, must turn again almost at once, to be prepared to meet the pursuer.

They did not pause as I said "Farewell." Walking on at such a pace as Sybil at least

had never accomplished before, and with those same long, stealthy, striding footsteps which had become to me the very impersonation of flight and guiltiness, Jamie stretched out his hand to me—a long, strong, clinging grasp, though neither of us could see the other's face, or anything but the outline of the moving figure upon the steady hedgerow that enclosed us. Then I said: "God bless you." I was not used to such words, but they came with all the might of suppressed sobs out of my full heart.

And they went on—on into the conscious silence, the deep, brooding, watchful gloom, their faint steps growing fainter, their indistinct figures fading into the depths of night. Away out of all the known and certain life, which threw down barriers behind them, even here on this very spot where I stood solitary on the road, forbidding their return—away into the chaos of a strange world, where unknown seas and skies waited for them darkly, holding a fate which no prophecy of human tongue could foretell.

Alas ! alas ! poor youthful pilgrims, going out upon the waste of life bearing their burden !— and the darkness closing down on every side of them, hiding their path before, their track behind, and only lightening faintly to every immediate footstep—was the fit symbol of the future, into which they travelled with their lives in their hand.

For a few minutes—every second of that time looked so long—I stood where they had left me ; but no sound of their departing feet comes along the silent road—not a voice or breath to tell that human creatures, sorrow-laden, have passed within, steals out of this vast veil of darkness ; but instead of it the insects rustle among the unseen herbage, the twigs crack on the hedgerow boughs, the wind sweeps over my face, with withered leaves fluttering on its wing, and somewhere falls the invisible water, trickling as over some minute cascade, which is the invariable chorus of all this natural hum and faint recitative. Oh, lonely earth, solacing thyself day and night

with murmurs of this constant reverie ! Oh, mother desolate, whose heart has fainted over so many generations of the lost ! but the soul sinks that pauses, absorbed into itself another world, to hear the faint stir of communication with which the pulses move within the universal breast of this great conscious earth.

My mother stands beside the wall, looking out into the gloom ; the solitary parlour from which all life and interest seem to have passed away—the chill, blank house which you can think has fallen into a sudden stupor of watchfulness and exhausted silence, oppress her like a visible heaviness. There is at least free breathing without, and opportunity of watching the approach of the dreaded visitors, who are only too certain to return in search of our poor wanderer ; and as we stand together looking down upon the vacant road, we thank God in whispers and with tears that so far all is safe.

“ Are you ready for them ? ” I asked under my breath.

“Everything is cleared away, and I have left the great-coat in Marget’s hands, and warned her merely to be quiet and say nothing,” answered my mother in the same tone; “that was better, I thought, than any more particular caution. Was I right, Willie?”

I assented only with a gesture, and not daring to speak again, we stood looking out intently upon the descending road. For a long time our watch was vain, and my mother ventured to whisper to me, now and then, how far they would be by this time. She had even suffered herself to conclude that they might have already reached the first station, remote enough for safety, where the night coach from Edinburgh could take them up, when the dull dint of approaching steps startled us once more into breathless listening. Now two figures rapidly advancing come up with authority towards our door, and we have only time to seat ourselves opposite each other in the dim, half-lighted parlour, where the fire burns low, and the candle sheds a faint, ineffectual glow upon my

mother's work, when the voice of Donald Clerk demands admittance at the door.

His face is reddened over with a strange intoxication of triumph, and a constable from Moulisburgh accompanies him. "Resistance is quite useless," says Donald, as Marget starts up, with a natural impulse of defence, to place herself between him and the parlour door. "Stand out of the road, my woman. I'll come to you by-and-bye."

I myself, hurrying forward, open the parlour door to him ; but, calling to his attendant to watch there, Donald makes a spring up the stairs. Following him, with as much assumption of unconcernedness as I can muster, I demand his authority with a faltering voice—though I have not the slightest doubt that he has all the legal warrant that is needed, and I cannot quite conceal the tremor with which I follow him into the very room which Jamie has so lately left.

My mother steals up after us, and looks on by the door. With a disappointed eye he

prowls round this deserted hiding-place, twitches vehemently the curtains, which still remain at the window, in a vain attempt to find them merely temporary expedients—my mother has taken care of that—and lifts the furniture about with a baffled impatience. From this room to another—from this flat of our little house up into the long, low garret lumber-room, which slopes into the roof, then with loud and violent footsteps down once more to the parlour and kitchen, to the dark passage and the full presses, even to the cupboard in the wall. When all is done he turns round, glaring with rage and vexation, upon the honest country constable, who has just opened with imitative zeal the lid of Marget's "kist," when his eye catches the great-coat hanging on a chair.

"What do you call this?" and Donald clutched at the shoulder of the indignant Marget, and dragged her forward to the fire-light. "I say, woman, what do you call this?"

"What do I ca' that?—if you had had as

muckle bother wi't, you would have nae occasion to spier. It's ane of the laddies' big coats—onybody might see that, that had half an e'e; and will you just let me ken what business Peter Dudgeon has in my kist?"

"I've seen him wear it many a day," said Donald Clerk. "I'll reward you, mark you, woman, if you'll let me see where he's in hiding about the house—for by this I see he has come home."

"Yon's him," said Marget.

I was standing in the shadow of the kitchen-door. Donald Clerk sprang upon me. "It's but you!" he exclaimed, shaking me violently, "what do I want with him? It's Jamie, woman, Jamie their youngest—and this coat here is his to my certain knowledge. Where is he?"

"It's a grand thing to have guid wit," said Marget, carelessly, "the tae laddies' coat is the marrow of the tither. They got them, Martin-mas was a year ago, just afore the mistress got her second guiddaughter hame. I marked a

muckle J. and W. on the skirt of ilka ane mysel—it's easy seeing by that wha's it is."

I started forward to prevent the examination; but Marget had before satisfied herself that all was right. Jamie by some strange chance had taken *my* coat instead of his own, for there, emblazoned on its inner skirt, was Marget's sign manual, the initial letter of my name.

A fierce, slow, glance of suspicion travelled round us, pausing on one after another of our faces. "Do you mean to look me in the face and say that he hasna been here this day?" said Donald, fixing his eyes on my mother; but before she could have answered him, even had she not been wholly checked and struck dumb by the abrupt directness of the question, he tossed the coat into a corner and turned away.

"No, I canna seethe the kid in its mother's milk—I'm no come that length yet," said Donald, and calling angrily to his assistant, he turned upon his heel and strode away. We heard him for a full half hour after, searching

through the garden among the trees and bushes, and for a still longer time could identify his footsteps about the road. But at last every sound died away into the hush of midnight—the danger was past.

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